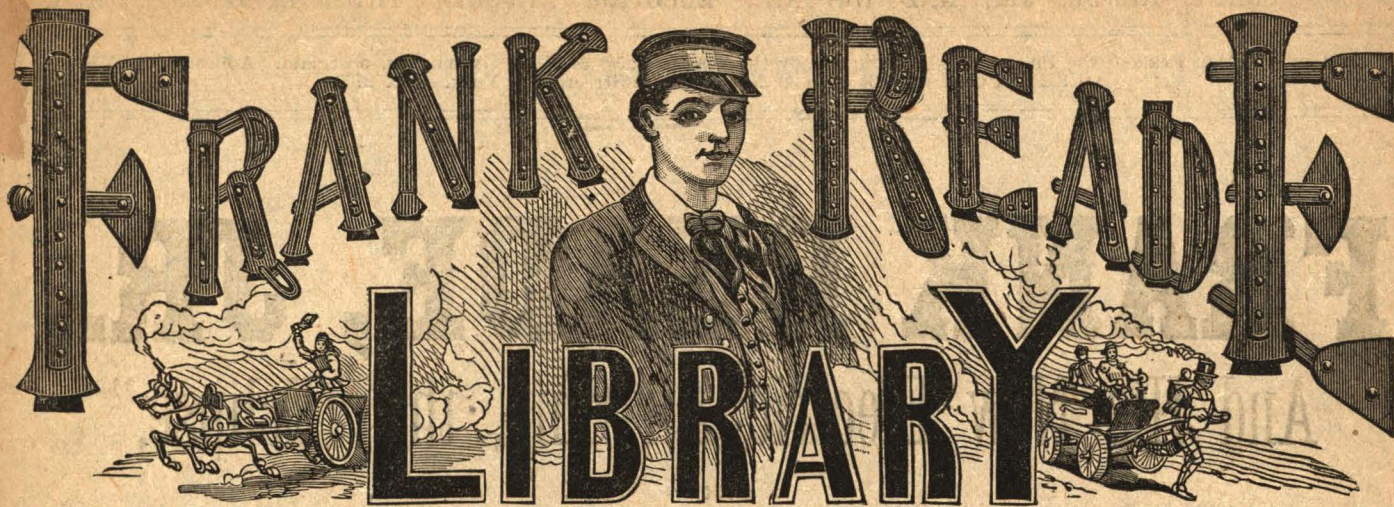


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Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York, N. Y., Post Office, October 5, 1892.

No. 85. { COMPLETE. } FRANK TOUSEY, PUBLISHER, 34 & 36 NORTH MOORE STREET, NEW YORK. { PRICE } Vol. IV.
New York, July 20, 1894. ISSUED WEEKLY. { 5 CENTS. }

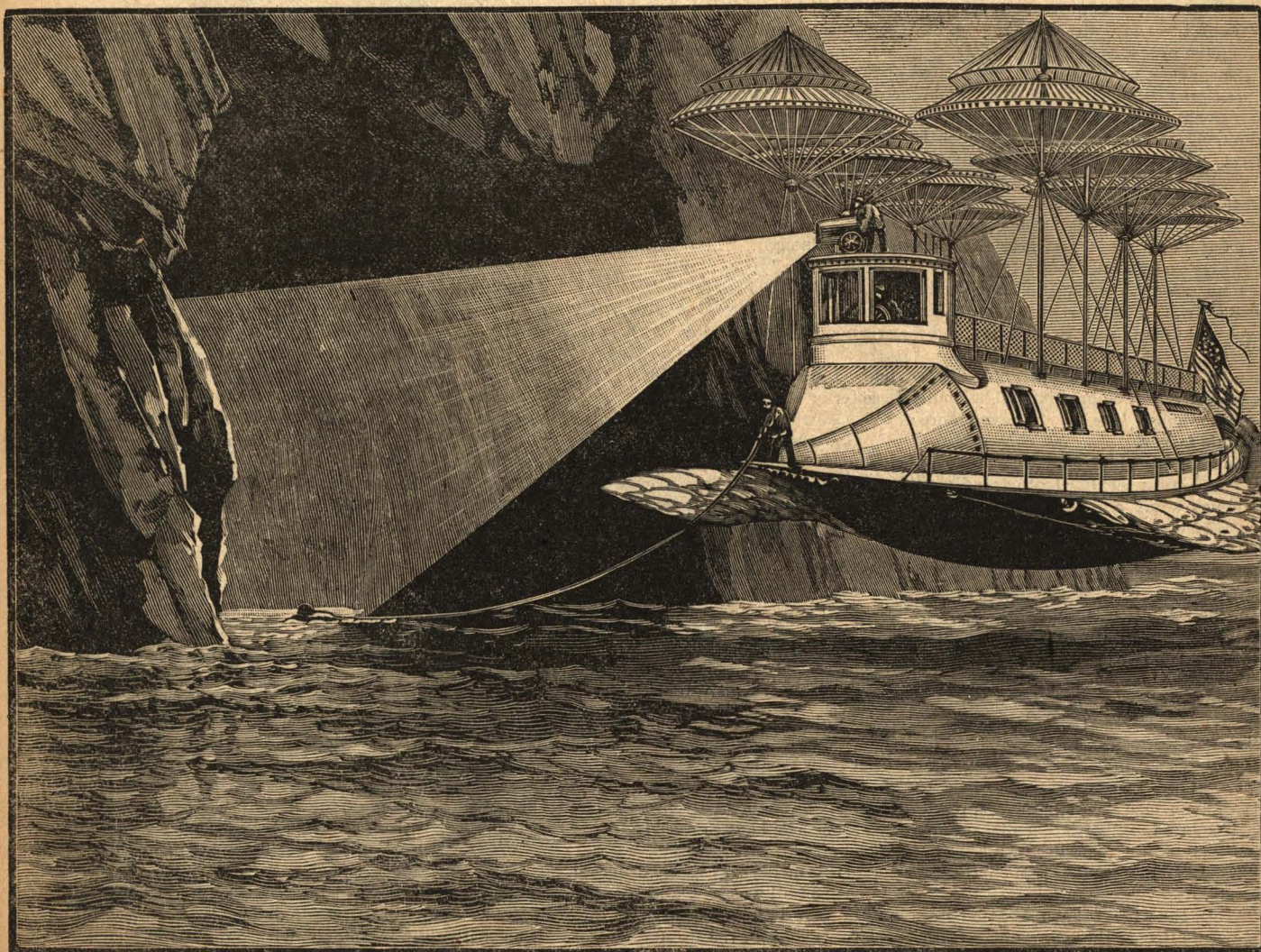
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Frank Reade, Jr.,

and His New Electric Air-Ship, the "Eclipse;" or,
FIGHTING THE CHINESE PIRATES.

PART I.

BY "NONAME."



A long line was procured and tied to Pomp under his shoulders. Then he was lowered into the water, and with Barney paying out the line he drifted down with the current. The darky struck out and swiftly swam down the current. The search-light made things in the cavern as light as day.

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FRANK READE, JR.,

And His New Electric Air-Ship, the "Eclipse,"

OR,

FIGHTING THE CHINESE PIRATES.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "Frank Reade, Jr., With His Air-Ship in Asia; or, A Flight Across the Steppes," etc., etc.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

THE NEW AIR-SHIP.

"Is it true, Mr. Reade, that you have constructed a new air-ship?"

The speaker, note-book in hand, waited upon a well-proportioned, fine-looking young man, who stood at the brick arched gateway of a foundry yard in the thriving city of Readestown. The hour was noon and the hundreds of mechanics employed in the place were filing out to dinner.

"It is true, sir," replied the young man, who was a most famous personage and known all over the world as a wonderful inventor. He was no other than the distinguished Frank Reade, Jr., the builder of air-ships, and the inventor of many wonderful steam and electric marvels.

Frank Reade, the young inventor's father, had been an inventor before him and had built these machine-shops. The son was even more gifted than his father.

The man who had addressed Frank Reade, Jr., was a most peculiar looking individual.

He was short and fat, with a jolly air, and wore a loud suit of plaid with a stand-up collar and white tall hat. Diamonds sparkled upon his fingers and he looked like an edition of the city sport.

But he was really nothing of the kind.

"Why do you ask the question?" asked Frank Reade, Jr., as he saw the fellow jotting something down in his book.

In reply the other handed him a card. Frank accepted it, and read:

"CALEB SQUEERS,

"Reporter and Interviewer.

"Associated Press, New York City."

"Ah, you are a newspaper representative, then," said Frank, with a genial manner. "I suppose you want to write the air-ship up?"

"Exactly, Mr. Reade," replied the reporter, suavely.

"Well, thus far I have kept visitors and sight-seers from these premises. But the Eclipse is finished and ready to sail, and I can see no good reason why I cannot do you the favor."

"I felt sure, Mr. Reade," said Squeers, with a low bow, "that you would not disappoint the curious millions of readers in this country who are looking forward eagerly to a detailed and printed account of your newest invention."

"Notoriety is something which I always avoid," replied Frank, almost sternly. "You shall see the Eclipse upon the condition that you will publish no sensational account of her. Give the bare facts."

Caleb Squeers bowed obsequiously.

"I will give you my word," he said.

"Enough!" cried Frank. "Come this way with me."

Caleb Squeers followed Frank into the foundry yard. Crossing this, they approached a mammoth building with a heavily trussed roof.

Passing through a door, they were in the interior of this structure.

A wonderful sight rewarded the gaze of Squeers.

The new air-ship, the Eclipse was before him. As his quick, shrewd gaze took in the shape and details of the new invention, an exclamation of admiration burst from his lips.

"Grand! Wonderful!" he declared, excitedly. "I had no idea it was such a thing of beauty, Mr. Reade."

"I think she excels anything in this line that I have ever constructed," declared Frank, with pardonable pride. "Just step this way, please, and I will describe her to you more particularly."

Caleb Squeers, the prince of newspaper reporters, with note-book in hand, followed Frank Reade, Jr. He was already busily making notes.

As the famous inventor declared, the Eclipse far excelled any previous effort of his in the line of air-ships.

Her model was vastly different.

The hull was long and rakish with the outlines of a clipper-ship. But the deck was entirely roofed over in a concave fashion with ribs and plates of thinly rolled steel and platinum. The entire hull was, for that matter, manufactured of this light but strong material.

At the junction of the roof with the deck on either side wide wings projected, running the length of the air-ship.

These were so arranged as to admit of being drawn in and securely fastened to the side of the ship in case of storm or high wind.

The object of the wings was to give the air-ship buoyancy and also to aid in a gentle descent.

In the convex-shaped roof of steel there were on either side four sliding grated windows with steel shutters, to be opened or closed as necessity demanded. Forward was a square window to a pilot-house which contained a wheel and binnacle like any sailing craft.

Just over the pilot-house was a small platform, reached from the pilot-house by a small stairway, and upon which was placed an electric search-light of enormous power.

A long platform or outer deck extended from stem to stern on either side of the air-ship with a railing, and on a level with the spreading automatic wings.

A door made to slide up or down at will opened upon this platform or deck. The bottom of the craft was furnished with projections near the keel like small blocks of wood, upon which the air-ship might rest when upon the ground, so as to preserve a level and keep her upright.

Everything was elegant, light and graceful about the hull and showed the most skilled of workmanship.

But the motive and elevating power of the air-ship was the most important feature of all. Upon each side were four tall rotascopes, making eight in all. These were operated by means of a series of cog-wheel arrangement in the hold of the air-ship, in turn propelled by a powerful electric current derived from storage batteries, the peculiar invention of Frank Reade, Jr.

These were so swift and powerful in their action as to be capable of holding the air-ship aloft in midair with only a mild current of electricity, while a stronger current would cause it to shoot upward into space with the rapidity of a newly inflated balloon.

Frank Reade, Jr., had very cleverly solved the problem of elevation in the invention of the rotascopes.

But this was not all. It was necessary to have a propeller.

At the stern of the air-ship there was rigged an eight-bladed screw, with diverging flanges, and of sufficient size to act upon the air currents with great power.

This driven with the full speed of the dynamos, would cause the Eclipse to shoot forward through the air with tremendous rapidity.

All these outward points of the air-ship Frank Reade, Jr., illustrated to Caleb Squeers in a comprehensive manner. Then he said:

"Well, Mr. Squeers, now that you have seen the outward workings of the Eclipse, let me show you the interior."

"I am more than pleased," declared the reporter, with alacrity. "Indeed, Mr. Reade, this surpasses all the inventions ever placed on record."

Frank ascended a small gangway, and they went aboard the air-ship. Passing into the first cabin, Squeers gazed about him in a dazed way.

It was a scene of beauty and magnificent furnishings. Books, papers, charts, scientific instruments; all were in proper places.

Beyond this cabin was a parlor, upholstered in rich plush, and still beyond it the dining saloon.

Everything was magnificent. Indeed, it looked more the quarters of a prince of the blood than aught else. The humble newspaper man gazed about him in utter amazement.

"Why, Mr. Reade," he declared, "this is wonderful beyond belief. Why, you are an autocrat in your air-ship. You could make the cities of the world pay tribute to you. Only think, all you would have to do would be to sail over some town and drop a few of your electric bombs down into the streets."

"My air-ships are not invented with any such purpose in view," declared Frank, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"What do you intend to do with the ship?" asked Squeers, curiously.

"It is possible that I may take an extended journey to some far part of the world. I have always found use enough for my air-ships."

"Such as going to the relief or rescue of imprisoned countrymen in some far land," ventured Squeers.

"You are partly right."

"Do you intend the Eclipse for any such errand?"

"Not unless I have the necessary incentive," replied Frank.

An odd light shone in Squeers' eyes. He was silent a moment and then said:

"Last of all, Mr. Reade, let me see the working of the electric engines. After which I have something very important to tell you."

Frank led the way into the engine-room of the Eclipse. Here were revealed the storage batteries and the powerful dynamos which furnished the motive power of the air-ship.

After duly explaining all the intricate mechanism to the reporter they finally returned to the main saloon or cabin. The famous inventor motioned Squeers to a seat and then sat down by a table himself.

Squeers had intimated that to inspect the air-ship alone was not the sole object of his visit. Therefore, Frank Reade, Jr., regarded him questioningly.

"Well, Mr. Squeers," he said, quietly, "what do you think of the Eclipse?"

"I think she is the greatest wonder the

world has ever known," declared Squeers, enthusiastically. "You are certainly the most wonderful man of this age, Mr. Reade."

Frank blushed and looked a little annoyed at this pointed compliment. But Squeers laughed in a good humored way, and continued:

"Pardon me if I was a little pronounced in my statement," he declared. "It is only my way. I cannot thank you enough for your kindness in showing me the great wonder, Mr. Reade. But I may as well tell you right here, that I came to Readestown upon a far weightier errand than an inspection of the Eclipse for a newspaper report. I did not mention this to you, in the first place, as I had a curiosity to see the ship."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Frank, in some surprise. "What, may I ask, is the real object of your visit?"

"It involves the question of human life," was the startling reply.

CHAPTER II.

DR. VANEYKE'S STORY.

FRANK READE, JR., was not a little surprised at this reply. He gazed critically at Squeers and saw that he was in earnest.

"I don't know as I understand you," he said, calmly.

"I owe you an explanation," began Squeers. Then he stopped. The reason for this was quickly made obvious.

A quick step sounded just outside the cabin door. The next moment three men appeared in the doorway. Their manner was excited.

The first was a tall, well-formed man of sixty years, yet lively as many a younger man. His white hair and beard gave him a patriarchal appearance.

He was in reality a very noted scientist and a dear friend of Frank Reade, Jr.'s. He paused a moment on the threshold and his face lit up at sight of Frank.

"Thank Heaven!" he cried, joyfully. "We have found you at last!"

"Dr. Vaneyke!" cried Frank, springing up. "My dear old friend, I am glad to see you. You look well and hearty."

"And so I am," replied the doctor. "I have come to see you upon a very important errand. First, however, allow me to introduce my friends, Mr. Howard Osborne and Mr. James Clark."

Frank Reade, Jr., shook hands with the two friends of Dr. Vaneyke. Both were fine-looking men of middle age. Osborne was a banker in New York and James Clark was a merchant in lower Broadway, the same city.

"I am very glad to meet you, gentlemen," said Frank, politely. "Pray make yourselves comfortable. The doctor's friends are always mine."

"Thank you!" replied both, in the same moment. Then Mr. Osborne, the banker, continued:

"We have heard very much of you, Mr. Reade. You are the most famous inventor of this century."

"Thank you!" replied Frank, modestly. "I fear you do me too much honor."

"That would be impossible," put in the merchant, Mr. Clark.

"But this is not business," burst in Dr. Vaneyke, as he saw that Frank was getting embarrassed. "Let us come to the point—"

The doctor paused. He had just set eyes upon Caleb Squeers. In an instant a light of recognition flashed from his eyes.

"As I live!" he cried. "Look, Osborne and

Clark, here is that indefatigable newspaper reporter, Caleb Squeers."

"Gentlemen," said Squeers, arising with a bland smile, "I greet you! I told you that I should be in at the finish. You will find it so, and if any living power can rescue those unfortunate tourists or rather Indian Ocean voyagers I mean to see that it is done."

"Bravo, Squeers!" cried the banker and the merchant together. "You are certainly a clever worker. If you succeed the ten thousand dollars reward is yours."

"I mean to succeed," replied Squeers.

Frank Reade, Jr., looked puzzled. Dr. Vaneyke threw upon the cabin table a pile of papers and cried:

"Now, Frank, an explanation is due you. I will make it, and begin by first telling you a thrilling story:

"One year ago the schooner yacht of Mortimer Osborne was hailed by the British steamer Princess Ida in the Yellow Sea, not one hundred miles off the River of Pearls on the coast of Boca Tigris. She was then bound for Hong Kong. Mr. Osborne, the brother of this gentleman with us, is a retired millionaire, and with a party of his friends had been making a tour of the world in his yacht, the Daisy. The party consisted of Mr. Mortimer Osborne, his daughter, Myrtle, a cousin, Will Deane, and his chum, Jack Clark, who is the son of Mr. James Clark here. The Daisy's crew numbered five seamen, all trustworthy men. As I have stated, the Daisy was hailed by the Princess Ida, since which date not a trace of her or of any in the party or crew has ever been found.

"The yacht's company together with the craft has as mysteriously vanished as if swallowed up by the earth.

"The theory exists that the yacht might have went down in a typhoon or wind storm common to those seas. But a careful investigation has led to developments which tend to disprove this theory.

"A man turned up in Hong Kong, and told a thrilling story to the United States consul there.

"He claimed to be one of the yacht's crew, and said that the Daisy had been captured by a Chinese pirate junk, scuttled and sunk, while the yacht's party had been carried off prisoners.

"Of course the consul set about an investigation. But the bearer of the thrilling news failed to turn up again. Two days later his mutilated corpse was found in the river. He had been mysteriously murdered.

"Of course with his death all clues terminated. But the consul cabled to New York, via London, and communicated the facts to Mortimer Osborne's American relatives.

"In the meantime, the failure of the yacht to turn up at any port only confirmed the thrilling report. Active measures were at once employed to obtain redress for the terrible outrage.

"The government took the case in hand and the Chinese government did all in their power to unearth the mystery. But Chinese methods of detection of crime are slow.

"Moreover, the coast beyond Boca Tigris was thickly infested with pirates, who seemed wholly beyond the pale of the law, and who set the native government at defiance.

"Learning this the government at Washington caused a man-of-war, then in Hong Kong, to proceed to Boca Tigris and scour the coast thoroughly. But this did not result in the finding of even the slightest cliew.

"In despair, Messrs. Osborne and Clark have

offered the magnificent sum of ten thousand dollars to the party who will visit Boca Tigris and rescue the captives of the pirates, who they doubt not are still held in captivity there.

"It occurred to me at once that as a philanthropic and charitable man, this distressing case would at once interest you, and I have taken the liberty to bring Messrs. Osborne and Clark to you.

"Something ought to be done at once to effect the rescue of our countrymen, who no doubt are held in slavery by the Chinese pirates, who, it is well known, are able to set the Chinese government at defiance. There is but one man in the world who can rescue Mortimer Osborne and party, and that man is Frank Reade, Jr."

As Dr. Vaneyke finished this exciting narrative of facts, Frank Reade, Jr., showed the greatest of interest.

"It is, indeed, a hard position for the unfortunate voyagers if they are yet alive," he said, quietly. "I am much interested in the story, doctor. As you say, something ought to be done at once."

A great cry of eagerness escaped the lips of Howard Osborne.

"Oh, Mr. Reade," he cried, "you can rescue my dear brother and the others. With your air-ship you can go where the U. S. war-ship and her crew cannot."

"We will pay you any sum you may ask," cried Clark.

But Frank waved his hand.

"Enough!" he cried, almost sternly. "I do not work for pay in a case which involves humanity. Have no further fears. I am anxious to give the Eclipse a voyage, and this trip will just suit me. It is the opportunity which I wanted. Gentlemen, I will undertake to rescue the Daisy's party."

Instantly all sprung up and gave a cheer. The joy of the two New Yorkers knew no bounds. As for Dr. Vaneyke, his face shone like a bright June day.

The matter was settled. Frank Reade, Jr., was not of the sort to indulge in useless conversation, so that his visitors were presently very ceremoniously shown out. But Caleb Squeers came closely to Frank's side and said in an undertone:

"Mr. Reade, you will find use for a chap of my build. Allow me to go with you on this trip."

Frank gave a quick start. He had known Squeers not more than an hour, but had taken a fancy to the fellow.

Therefore acting wholly upon impulse, he replied:

"Very well, sir. You shall go. But remember, no sensational articles now!"

"All right, sir," cried Squeers, with delight. "When shall we sail?"

"Within two days," replied the famous inventor. "Doctor, will you go along this time?"

The doctor had accompanied Frank on many previous expeditions.

"Of course I will," he cried, excitedly. "And Barney and Pomp will go, too, will they not?"

"I shall send for them this hour," replied Frank.

Barney and Pomp were two old and faithful servants of Frank Reade, Jr.'s. Barney was a type of the fun-loving, large-hearted Irishman, and Pomp was an Ethiopian with a very hard head, but unparalleled skill and sagacity in his duties.

Caleb Squeers went out at once, and sent a glaring dispatch to New York of the intended trip of Frank Reade, Jr., in his new air-ship

the Eclipse to China to effect the rescue of the Daisy's party. Then he went to work preparing for his prospective aerial voyage.

It is hardly necessary to dwell upon the details of the next forty-eight hours. Suffice it to say that in that brief time the Eclipse was stored with provisions and fully equipped with arms and ammunition for the battle with the Chinese pirates.

The newspapers made a great heading in each issue, and an intense excitement was created in all circles. Indeed, it seemed almost a national affair, the starting of the Eclipse for China.

The morning named for the start came. The Eclipse had been drawn out of her quarters and was all in readiness.

By her rail stood two individuals who would have attracted attention anywhere. One was an Irishman dressed in corduroy, and the other was a negro with a vari-colored checked suit on.

"Bejabers, it's glad I am that Misther Frank is goin' to Chiney," cried Barney O'Shea, with a broad grin.

"Wha' fo' yo' glad ob 'dat, 'Ish?" asked Pomp, innocently.

"Begorra, I'll have a chance to mate the bloody Chinayser on his own sod," replied Barney. "Shure av' he has no more pluck there than phwat he has in Ameriky, we cud lick the whole tribe av thim, naygur."

"Don' wan' no part ob a Chiney," replied Pomp, shaking his head. "Ain' got nuffin' ag'in 'em an' don' want nuffin' to do wif 'em."

"Yah, yah!" sneered Barney. "I allus thought yez a fraud and a coward, naygur, an' now I know it fer shure."

"Hi dar, don' yo' gib me no sass, 'Ish."

Barney put out his foot and tripped Pomp who fell on his face. The Irishman howled with laughter. But his mirth was short lived, for Pomp sprung up quick as a flash and lowering his head made a dash for his tormentor.

He struck Barney full in the stomach. The Hibernian went down like a log, and Pomp on top of him. They grappled and quite a scuffle might have followed but that Frank Reade, Jr., suddenly appeared.

"Enough of that, you rascals!" he cried.

"Come, work lively now. We must be afloat in thirty minutes."

The two skylarkers scrambled to their feet in a crestfallen manner and rushed away. They were soon in assiduous performance of their duties just as if nothing had happened.

At this moment two others now came on deck with a great quantity of luggage.

The first was Dr. Vaneyke and behind him came Caleb Squeers.

All were on board now and all was in readiness. The Eclipse rested upon her posts in the foundry yard. The big gates were closed and beyond them was a mighty crowd waiting anxiously for a sight of the air-ship as it should ascend.

Upon a platform in the yard were gathered a number of Frank Reade, Jr.'s most intimate friends.

His loving wife was there, and the little boy in whom the famous inventor's hopes were all centered. Frank embraced them, and then sprang to the deck of the air-ship.

"Good-bye, all!" he cried.

Then there was a whirring of the rotascopes, the Eclipse swayed and trembled and gradually rose. Up, up she went like a monster eagle.

Now she was in full view of the people outside the yard. Wild cheer after cheer filled the air.

Bands played, the crowd yelled, and a few fireworks were displayed. Up, up went the air-ship until she was a thousand feet above the town.

Then the propellers began to work, and a course was set for San Francisco. The eventful journey to the Celestial Kingdom was begun. Its outcome was destined to be of thrilling sort.

CHAPTER III.

A DEADLY PERIL.

It was not Frank Reade, Jr.'s purpose to cross the Pacific on his way to China in midair.

It was a long sail, and subject to storms peculiar to those latitudes. It would be a tremendous strain upon the air-ship, so he decided to go as far as San Francisco, and there take the Eclipse apart and proceed to Hong Kong by steamer.

This could be easily done, for the air-ship was so constructed that it could be taken apart in sections and safely stowed away in the steamer's hold.

Caleb Squeers soon became a great favorite with all on board the air-ship.

He was full of wit and good cheer, and was a versatile magician. He had brought with him all the paraphernalia of an accomplished prestidigitator.

"It may come of good account in that heat-then clime," he declared. "I mean to try conclusions with some of the famous Chinese jugglers."

Pomp and Barney made good friends with Squeers, and all voted him a welcome addition to the party.

He explained his acquaintanceship with Osborne and Clark to Frank Reade, Jr.

"You see," he said, comprehensively, "the Associated Press people detailed me to interview them and write up the Chinese pirate affair. I did so and it was really the means of enlisting the services of the government and its war-ship in the search for Mortimer Osborne. When the ten thousand dollars reward was offered, I told them that I should win it and I at once set out for Readestown to interview you. You know the rest. I felt sure that if any living person could save the Daisy and party it was you."

"We shall do our best," said Frank, earnestly. "If they are yet alive, I have hope that we shall succeed."

Three days passed without any incident worthy of note.

The air-ship kept on her way with straight and steady course. It was a favorite pastime with Squeers to sit by the rail and watch the country below.

It was his first experience of the kind and of course the novelty enchained him.

The mighty stretches of land and water so far below looked like a mighty map. There was a constant change of scene and incident in that vast panorama.

Only the most acute imagination can adequately depict it.

Now they were sailing a thousand feet above a vast plain, upon which roamed the deer and a few buffalo. Then the mighty crags of some chain of the Rockies would come in view, and the Eclipse would hover over mighty canyons, deep valleys and high pinnacles, which were weird and wild enough for a version of Dante's Inferno.

Occasionally roving bands of Indians were seen below. At sight of the air-ship they would seem convulsed with terror, which was, no doubt, engendered of superstition, and put-

ting their ponies to full speed dash madly away.

Once a battle scene between two hostile parties was observed. Caleb called Frank's attention to it first.

"They're just eating each other up," he cried, facetiously. "It is about as well to let them continue, is it not?"

"Yes," replied Frank. Then with a sudden idea: "But it is evident they do not see the Eclipse. Supposing we drop a few bombs down there."

"Good!" cried Caleb, with alacrity. "That will be good sport. Give them a surprise."

Barney and Pomp seconded the scheme and even Dr. Vaneyke came out of the cabin to see the fun.

Several electric bombs were brought out of the cabin. The air-ship was slowed to almost a stop just over the combatants.

Fully half a hundred savages were fighting madly in an inextricable heap. Dead Indians and ponies strewed the prairie.

Frank had no desire to kill any of the barbarians. It was simply his purpose to give them a fright.

Accordingly, he selected a good spot and dropped one of the bombs.

It struck the ground just fifty yards from the struggling horde. The effect was terrific and sublime.

The bomb exploded with frightful detonation. A great furrow was torn in the floor of the prairie, a vast quantity of earth and pebbles was hurled aloft and filled the air.

Instantly a tremendous uproar followed. The fighting savages broke ranks with horror, and at sight of the air-ship hovering over them, fell upon their faces in the maddest of terror.

To their ignorant minds the air-ship was a thing of supernatural sort—a monster from the unknown world, dominated by evil spirits.

The situation was a comical one indeed, and convulsed all on board the air-ship with laughter. Caleb Squeers laughed until the tears ran down his face.

Then from mere force of habit out came his note-book, and he proceeded to write up the affair.

"This article will be worth a hundred dollar bill to me," he declared, excitedly. "Oh, this trip will make my fortune. I shall write a book and sell a million copies."

A few moments later the air-ship had passed beyond the scene of excitement, and quiet was once more restored.

A few hours later, the air-ship hung over a vast lake down among mighty mountain ranges. A city of no mean proportion was to the northward.

"I declare that looks like Salt Lake City," declared Squeers, pulling out his note-book.

"It is the Mormon city," replied Frank. "With this glass you can easily distinguish the Mormon temple."

Across Utah, the Eclipse took its flight, and then came the last of the salt basins and alkali deserts as the State of Nevada was crossed.

Over the wild region of the Great Basin, and at length in sight of the Sierras, the Eclipse passed.

To cross this mighty mountain chain and have the mighty Pacific burst upon their view was a wonderful experience.

The air-ship at length hung three thousand feet over the city of San Francisco.

As the Eclipse began to descend, the streets of the Golden Gate city were seen to be filled with excited throngs of people.

The appearance of the air-ship over the city had created a tremendous sensation.

Of course the telegraph had apprised the people long ere this of the coming of Frank Reade, Jr., and his wonderful invention. But this had not lessened the interest.

Even at that height the cheering of the populace could be heard.

It would have been extremely unsafe for the Eclipse to have descended into the midst of that throng.

But Frank had foreseen this danger and had provided for it.

A large ship-yard had been provided for the Eclipse to alight in. There was a high wall around this and barred gates. Here the air-ship would be taken apart and stored in sections on board the Pacific Mail steamer bound for Hong Kong.

The Eclipse descended like a mighty winged bird into the yard. Quite a large crowd of the city's notables were there in a body to give reception, and the mayor of San Francisco was the first to step forward and shake hands with Frank Reade.

"Welcome to the Golden Gate, Mr. Reade," he said, warmly.

The reception accorded Frank and his companions was a warm one. It was with difficulty that the famous inventor could extricate himself from the numerous invitations to be feted and dined.

Indeed, Frank could have spent an indefinite time in the Golden Gate in this way.

But he pleaded the urgency of an immediate start for China, and finally the air-ship was safely stored aboard the steamer.

The next morning the Golden City, as the steamer was named, sailed out of the harbor of San Francisco and put to sea.

We will not dwell upon the voyage across to Hong Kong, which was uneventful, but transport the readers at once to the real theater of action of the story. Suffice it to say that the Golden City arrived safely at Hong Kong one fine morning.

The American Consul, Wilson, came off in a small boat to meet Frank Reade, Jr. He was a small, wiry-built man, with a pleasant cast of features.

"If you can succeed in worsting those pirates," he cried, excitedly, "I tell you, Mr. Reade, you will not only win the praise of the American colony here, but every good Chinaman as well."

"I shall try," replied Frank, modestly.

Arrangements had been made in advance by cable, by which the air-ship was to be accorded the safety of the ship-yard. Accordingly—as soon as possible—the sections were removed from the ship's hold, and by Frank's direction the construction was prosecuted.

Quite a number of American residents and a few Chinese officials thronged the yard. They watched with interest the putting together of the air-ship.

At length the last bolt was riveted, the last screw driven and the storage jars filled, so that the air-ship was all ready once more for a fresh voyage.

As she now stood completed the Chinese officials and the American residents viewed her with wonder and admiration.

"Truly, Mr. Reade," declared Wilson, the consul, "I do not see why you cannot easily do battle with the pirates. Your air-ship far exceeds anything my imagination ever portrayed."

Frank was about to reply, but at the moment a thrilling thing occurred. Outside the big

gates half the population of Hong Kong had gathered.

Suddenly there was a tremendous uproar. The clash of arms was heard, and the gates were suddenly burst open. Into the yard sprang a hundred armed Chinese giants, swinging their long, keen swords over their heads.

"The emperor's guard!" cried Consul Wilson in amazement and terror. "Treachery! For your lives, all! Mr. Reade, arm your men, or you will be assassinated. There is some misunderstanding here. Quick, for your lives!"

Wilson sprang to the air-ship's bow, and seizing the American flag, swung it aloft.

"Back, you dogs!" he cried, in Chinese. "We are under the protection of the American flag."

"We do not care for you or your flag!" yelled the leader of the guard in Chinese. "It is the emperor's orders to behead every one of you American dogs, who have come here to make war upon our people."

It was a moment of awful peril.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIGHT IN THE SHIP-YARD.

THE Chinese emperor's word is law in the Flowery Kingdom, and to disregard it is death.

Consul Wilson knew this and also that every one of the air-ship's crew would be put to death unless active measures were taken.

Self-defense was the only alternative. To repulse the attacking guard was the only hope.

The air was hideous with the yells of the populace outside the yard. For a moment Frank Reade, Jr., was dumfounded.

He could not understand this strange manifestation. He had not anticipated any trouble of this sort with the Chinese government.

If these men had attacked them by the emperor's orders, then it was a declaration of war.

It was an outrage upon the people of the United States, and the American government would be justified in calling China to account for it.

This was all clear enough to Frank. But the immediate question was one of personal safety.

He could not afford to lose his life.

The brutes would certainly murder him and his companions unless active steps were taken to prevent.

There was but one alternative, and that was to fight.

Wilson, the consul, had just leaped aboard the air-ship, hardly in time to save his life.

The yard held about half a score of sailors and workmen from the steamer Golden City.

Two of these were cut in pieces by the keen swords of the Chinese brutes.

Frank saw this, and it aroused the lion's spirit within him. In an instant he was upon the air-ship's deck.

"This is brutality!" he cried, madly. "I will show the Emperor of China that he cannot commit such an outrage with impunity. He shall pay for this!"

Barney and Pomp, who had traveled with Frank so much that they were never unprepared for an emergency of this sort, now appeared on deck with their rifles.

These were an invention of Frank Reade, Jr., and the bullet they carried was a small explosive shell, capable of deadly damage and always fatal.

Caleb Squeers and Dr. Vaneyke had been in the cabin and now came rushing out. Both sprang back after their rifles.

Frank was hardly in time to escape the scim-

iters of the Mongolian guards. He shouted excitedly to Barney and Pomp:

"Give them a volley! Our lives depend on it!"

The two faithful servitors needed no second bidding.

"Begorra, I'll blow the brains out av the spalpeens!", yelled Barney. "Whurroo! Yez bloody divils, luk out fer the Dandy of Con-naught!"

"Hi dar, gimme a shot at dem vilyuns. I'll jes' gib 'em somefin' hot an' yo kin bet yo' possum skins on it!" cried Pomp.

Bang—bang!

Both rifles spoke. Two of the giant Chinamen went down in a heap. The rifles were repeaters, and giving the lever a twitch, Barney and Pomp again pulled the trigger.

Bang—bang!

Two more of the brutes were stretched out in their death agony. But not before deadly work had been done with the Golden City's crew.

The sailors of course were unarmed, but they seized iron bars and billets of wood and stood on the defense as well as they could.

But the long, keen scimiters of the Chinese soldiers overreached these, and a blow was sufficient to decapitate any unfortunate American who received it.

Such as could had retreated to the ship's lighter at the wharf. But the Chinese outnumbered the little party ten to one. Every one of them would have been assassinated but for Frank Reade, Jr.

Caleb Squeers and Dr. Vaneyke now appeared with their rifles and opened fire on the villains.

With this terrific volley meeting them in the face, the Chinese guard were held at bay, so far as boarding the air-ship was concerned.

But something decisive needed to be done at once. The guard were being reinforced by the excited mob outside the gates.

A large-sized battle was imminent.

But Frank Reade, Jr., no longer had any fear, so far as the air-ship was concerned.

He knew that a turn of the electric lever would send it aloft and out of danger. All of his party were safely on board.

But the crew of the Golden City were in imminent danger of being literally exterminated. Immediate action only would save them.

Frank had ran into the forward cabin and now came out with a handful of small bombs.

He threw one into the midst of the giants who were pursuing the ship's crew onto the wharf. The effect was terrific.

Several of the brutes were torn to atoms. Consternation seized them. It was an opportunity in the strife. The Golden City's men were enabled to reach their boat and put out at once for the ship.

Six of the American sailors had been killed in the battle. At least twenty of the Chinese had been killed.

Seeing that the Golden City's crew were now safe, Frank sprang into the pilot-house and gave the rotascope lever a turn.

The rotascope began to turn and the air-ship shot up into the air. Six of the Chinese giants had grabbed the rail of the ship and were carried up with it.

The expression of terror on their faces was comical in the extreme when they suddenly found themselves a thousand feet above the earth.

Rendered insane in their terror, they suddenly let go their hold and went plunging down through space to a frightful death.

Wilson, the American Consul, could not re-

cover from the effect of the sudden transition for a few moments.

Then he ventured to approach the rail cautiously.

"My soul!" he gasped. "This is wonderful. But what if we should fall?"

All laughed at this. The terrible danger was over, and a relaxation of spirits was pleasant.

"No danger of that," cried Frank. "But now look at the transformation below."

All rushed to the rail and looked down. A wonderful sight was revealed.

The Chinese people, as well as the guards, had been literally astounded at the sudden upward flight of the Eclipse.

To them it was the work of a god, a supernatural feat. In an instant the superstition, so inherent in their natures, manifested itself.

One and all had fallen upon their faces in abject terror.

After this manifestation of supernatural power, the air-ship was safe to return to the earth.

Consul Wilson regarded the actions of the Chinese with contempt.

"Poor benighted fools!" he cried. "They are actually the greatest cowards on earth. But I am not as yet able to understand this attack made on us. Those guards would never have dared to do it but for an order from the emperor. Well, his Royal Highness may have to pay well for this little diversion. War with the United States will not be a pleasant subject for him to contemplate."

"Then the Chinese government have not yet become possessed of the modern methods of warfare?" ventured Caleb Squeers.

"By no means. Why, one of our ships could blow the whole city of Hong Kong to perdition."

"It seems a pity that those poor seamen should have been killed," said Dr. Vaneyke. "If the Emperor of China ordered the attack he should be made to hang for it."

"I cannot believe it," declared Wilson. "There is some mistake about it. I received an assurance but a day ago from one of the emperor's representatives, that his Highness would favor any effort made by Americans to chastise the pirates which are the curse of these shores, from here to the Ladronees."

"The fact yet remains," said Frank Reade, "that his guard attacked us."

"It must be the effect of malicious influence then," declared the consul.

"That is not improbable," agreed Frank. "Well, what would you advise doing?"

"You may land me at a safe point," replied Wilson, "and I will seek refuge on board one of our war-ships. Of course, it will hardly be safe for me to venture to return to the legation until after the riot has subsided."

This was plainly the only course to pursue. The course of the Chinese Monarch in ordering the attack upon the Americans was inexplicable.

"It is my opinion, though," declared Wilson, "that it is all a misunderstanding. A little explanation will set matters right."

"But what of the Golden City's sailors who have been so wantonly murdered?" asked Caleb Squeers, who was busy with his note-book.

"This is not the first demonstration of this kind," replied Wilson. "Many American residents have been persecuted and even murdered by the riotous element of the city. The Chinese are prejudiced against the presence of foreigners in their land. I have not the slightest idea that the order came direct from the emperor to attack us. Some meddling minis-

ter or viceroy may have given the command. Ah, I see the U. S. ship Despatch now anchored in the bay. If you will descend, Mr. Reade, I will go aboard and I have no doubt affairs will be very speedily settled."

"It shall be done," replied Frank Reade, Jr. Orders were given to Barney and Pomp to lower the Eclipse and bring her alongside the ship of war.

As the Eclipse began to descend into the harbor the rigging of the multitude of Chinese junks and indeed vessels of all nations about were seen to be thronged with curious sailors. The Chinese seemed to be in a state of great terror, and many of the junks incontinently put to sea.

The Eclipse descended until about one hundred feet above the Despatch's topmast.

The rigging was thronged with marines and the quarter deck held the officers of the ship, who were inspecting the Eclipse with their glasses.

Frank went to the rail and made signals to the officers. One of the marines more nimble than the others ventured into the top rigging, and shouted:

"Ahoy, up aloft! Who are ye?"

"The air-ship Eclipse," replied Frank Reade, Jr. "We have the U. S. Consul on board who wants to board your ship."

In a few moments an answer came from the commanding officer.

"Ahoy, the air-ship! Come alongside and we will take the consul off."

Frank then caused the Eclipse to descend until she touched the water. She had been made buoyant and floated safely on the water of the bay.

A boat instantly put out from the man-o'-war and came alongside.

Frank Reade, Jr., said to Barney and Pomp: "Keep good watch of the Eclipse. I am going to accompany the consul. I shall return shortly."

"Ay, sor!" replied Barney with a scrape. "Me an' the naygur will do that same, sor."

Frank entered the war-ship's cutter with Mr. Wilson and they were rowed to the ship. As they ascended the gangway they were received with ceremony by Admiral Dupont and his officers with an introduction from Mr. Wilson.

"We are more than glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Reade," declared the American commander, politely. "That is indeed a wonderful invention which you possess."

CHAPTER V.

A SETTLEMENT OF AFFAIRS.

"I THINK I may without egotism agree with you," replied Frank Reade, modestly.

"Zounds, man! It is the wonder of the century. Does the government at Washington know of the existence of such an air-ship?"

"Yes, indeed," replied Frank.

"Ah, then I shall look forward to a new navy which will do battle in the air instead of on the water."

"Not yet," replied Frank, resolutely. "I am a man of peace, Admiral Dupont. Undoubtedly the air-ship would prove the most formidable engine of warfare invented."

"Of course," replied the admiral, excitedly. "Don't you know that any government in the world would pay you millions for your patent?"

"I have no patent," replied Frank. "The construction of the air-ship is my secret. I alone own that. There is not money enough in the world to buy it."

"Tut, tut! you would not deprive human

kind of the vast advantages which the possession of such a secret would mean."

"Admiral!" replied Frank, firmly, "that secret would be used for the destruction of human life, for the conquering of nations. That is why I guard it. Agents from every large government on earth have interviewed me, but in vain. If my air-ship ever enters into warfare it shall be either for the relief of my country or for the maintenance of right against wrong. To right a terrible wrong is the object of my visit to China."

"You refer to the capture of the Daisy's party?" asked the admiral.

"I do."

"Well," replied the naval commander, "I hope you will succeed. I can assure you that we used every effort in our power. Of course the Chinese government is not responsible for the outrage. It is the work of pirates. They have done all in their power. But you will have a vast advantage over us. You can go anywhere with your air-ship."

"I hope to be successful," declared Frank. "Do you believe that the yacht's party are still alive?"

"There is no doubt of it. The pirates are cunning, and are holding them for ransom. Why, not two days ago they sent me a message stating terms for the surrender of the prisoners."

"Where do you believe these pirates hold out," asked Frank, eagerly.

"I should look for them along the coast beyond Boca Tigris."

"Another matter. What do you think of the attack upon us by the emperor's guard?"

"That was a singular and most unwarranted thing," replied the admiral. "I cannot believe but that it will come out all right, however. But certainly the emperor must apologize and pay a heavy indemnity."

At this moment a sharp cry came from a midshipman at the rail.

Consul Wilson had been conversing with a number of the officers. He now sprang to the rail as did all the rest.

Wilson caught sight of a Chinese steam vessel gorgeously decked with streamers which was approaching the Despatch and signaling it.

"It is the emperor's yacht," cried Wilson. "We shall soon find out what they are going to do."

Nearer came the yacht. A number of richly dressed functionaries were on the deck. As the yacht drew alongside, one of these, richly robed, walked up the gangway and reaching the deck made low obeisance to Admiral Dupont.

Wilson was the only man who could understand the Chinese language and he conversed with the bejeweled envoy for some moments.

After a time Wilson turned and said to the admiral and Frank Reade.

"It is just as I imagined. The attack upon our citizens was unauthorized by the emperor. The magistrate who ordered it will be beheaded, as well as every one of that detachment of the guard. The emperor makes humble apology, regrets the occurrence, and declares that any indemnity no matter how large shall be paid."

A few moments later the envoy made his return to the yacht and steamed away. The excitement was over, the riot ended, and the after part, viz., the report of the American Secretary of State, and final adjustment would devolve upon Wilson.

Frank Reade, Jr., drew a breath of relief when

he was fully assured that no international complications would follow.

It had been a narrow escape for the air-ship's party, but the main thing to be regretted was the slaughtering of the Golden City's sailors.

Frank Reade, Jr., had now nothing to do but to continue his journey. Therefore, he proceeded to leave the war-ship.

He shook hands warmly with the officers of the Despatch, and with Consul Wilson.

"We wish you the best of luck, Mr. Reade," declared Admiral Dupont, warmly. "If you whip the pirates, you will confer a great blessing upon humanity in this part of the world."

"Report to me when you can," said Wilson.

"Anything I can do to help you, Mr. Reade, do not fail to call on."

Frank thanked them and went on board the air-ship. In a few moments he was on deck detailing the result to Caleb Squeers, Dr. Van-eyke and Barney and Pomp.

There was nothing now to hinder an immediate setting forth on the quest for the pirates.

Accordingly, the rotascopes were set in motion, and the Eclipse rose from the water like a huge osprey and sped into the upper atmosphere.

The water of the bay shook with a salute fired by the Despatch, and the Golden City's rigging was crowded with cheering seamen.

When a thousand feet above the harbor, Frank set the air-ship's course up the coast.

Far below could be seen the strange panorama of the Chinese metropolis and its harbor, dotted with strange looking craft.

The streets of the city were seen to be thronged with excited multitudes who were gazing skyward.

It was the most exciting day undoubtedly that Hong Kong had seen for many a time.

Caleb Squeers occupied himself in looking for the American and English settlement.

He found it finally, and even at that distance, with his glass, he saw the balconies of the houses and the terraces crowded with his countrymen.

Even ladies could be distinguished at the United States Legation waving their mantles. Squeers gallantly waved a flag over the air-ship rail in return.

Of course the people looked upon the air-ship as a new and mighty invention of a scientific brain.

But the Mongolians were not disposed to take this practical view.

Superstition and ignorance held sway in their composition, and hundreds of the poor heathens could be seen on their knees paying worship to the strange "air god," as no doubt they construed the air-ship to be.

Frank Reade, Jr., as well as the others, could not help but laugh at the spectacle.

Mischievous Pomp hit upon an idea to impress upon the Chinese mind the air-ship's power. He appeared on deck with a bomb in which was placed a time fuse.

Two seconds after lighting the fuse the bomb would explode. Pomp dropped the bomb over the rail.

When half way to the ground it exploded. It was a magic bomb, one of the clever darcy's own invention, and after bursting, for a second or two the air was filled with darting dragon like figures.

This settled matters for the Chinese. The dragon is their deity, and they at once concluded that this was positive evidence that the air-ship was a "god of the air." Thousands prostrated themselves in the most abject terror.

Of course all this was very amusing to those on board the air-ship.

Caleb Squeers had his note-book half filled with thrilling data.

"Why, my fortune is made already," he declared, wildly. "When I get back to New York I shall at once have a book published on this subject, and sell a million copies. The royalty will make me rich."

"You have only begun on the preface as yet," said Frank Reade, calmly. "I dare say, Squeers, that before you see New York again, you will see more worth writing up than it ever fell to your lot before in the course of your life to witness."

"And I owe this unexcelled opportunity to your magnificent generosity!" cried Squeers, gratefully.

Darkness now began to come on. It was not a clear night, the sky being overcast and there being no moon.

Soon the earth was almost shrouded from view in the black pall of darkness. Of course the compass would carry them on a straight course, but Frank Reade, Jr., concluded that it would be better to find a safe place and descend.

The country below looked barren and uninhabited. At least it had just before the coming on of darkness.

Frank did not imagine that they were near any settlement of size.

The ocean was upon one side, and they had passed over a number of little coast towns, but he fancied they were now in a locality removed from human habitation.

Accordingly he gave Pomp orders to slow up the rotascopes and stop the propeller.

The order was obeyed and the air-ship began to descend.

Frank sprang to the search-light and shot its powerful rays downwards. As the mighty pathway of light illumined the face of the country below, the famous inventor gave a start.

He had been deceived. What he had imagined was a desolate, uninhabited tract of country was, instead, a small village, with a pagoda of imposing appearance in its center.

The search-light's glare lit up the streets of the little town like day. It was early in the evening, and lights were flashing in the shops and houses of the town.

Long lines of Chinese lanterns and lamps festooned the pagoda and the sacred temple connected with it.

It was a strange and beautiful sight for those on the deck of the air-ship.

But what was the sensation of the inhabitants of the town?

Surely the reader's imagination can be trusted for a safe conception of this. The appearance of the winged monster, with its blazing eye of light in the air above the town was an incident well calculated to drive the average Chinaman insane with terror.

Quite a number of pig-tailed heathens were in the streets of the village. With the sudden flashing of the search-light down into the street, making all as plain as day, these gave one upward look, and then fled, shrieking with terror.

The most fearful of excitement reigned in the place.

Drums and gongs beat madly in the temples, robed priests rushed out and threw themselves flat on their faces.

Evidently they firmly believed that the end of the world had come and that the Great Joss, their deity, had come for their souls to transport them to the celestial paradise.

It was a thrilling and yet amusing sight for those on board the air-ship.

Pomp cried out from the pilot-house:

"Marse Frank, I done fink yo' don' want dis chile to let the ship down in dat ar place, does yo'?"

"Yes," cried Frank. "Let her drop right in the street."

"But fo' goodness sake, Marse Frank!" cried the astonished dorky, "don' yo' see dat it am one ob dem Chinese places? Dey don' 'tack us again!"

"Do as I tell you, Pomp," cried Frank, authoritatively.

"A'right, Marse Frank."

Down went the Eclipse. In another moment it had touched the ground in a little square, just in the center of the town.

But not a John Chinaman was in sight.

CHAPTER VI.

SAM HOP'S INFORMATION.

The Eclipse certainly held the town at its mercy at that moment.

Frank Reade, Jr., knew well that it would be perfectly safe for the air-ship to descend here, working upon the superstitious fears of the natives as a safeguard.

Moreover, there was probably not an armed guard in the place. Consequently, it would be easy to hold the town subject to the air-ship's domination for a time at least.

The famous inventor had counted all these costs and had accepted the chance with a perfect assurance of safety.

Not a Chinaman was in sight.

The shops, with their stores of goods and lighted with lamps, the dwellings in the vicinity, all were vacated.

Indeed, those on board the air-ship could have easily carried off half the town for any opposition that would have been made.

Pomp had now quite recovered from his fears.

He understood Frank's reasoning now quite well and came out of the pilot-house with fresh confidence.

"Golly!" he exclaimed, with eyes like saucers. "Whar am all de people ob dis place gone to?"

Squeers and Frank both laughed.

"I reckon they think the Deity Dragon has lit upon the place," cried the correspondent. "It would be a picnic to carry off the town."

"Begorra, av' a moind to stheal a good chist av tea for a keepsake," cried Barney.

"G'long dar, yo' fool I'ishman," cried Pomp, derisively. "Yo' neber would hab dat red nose ob your'n if yo' had neber drank nuffin' stronger dan Chinese tea."

"Phwat's that to yez, yez monkey-faced African?" snorted Barney. "For jist half a dollar I'd spohil the face av yez."

"Golly! yo' jes better try dat, I'ish," scoffed Pomp. "I done make yo' fink yo' was 'sperimentin' wid a dynamite bomb."

A bucket of dirty water stood near the rail. Infuriated by the dorky's words Barney seized it and threw its contents over him.

Pomp was completely taken by surprise. He spluttered and gasped a moment. Then Barney's guffaws stirred up his blood, and he could think of nothing but revenge.

He started full tilt for the representative of the Emerald Isle. But Barney broke away, Pomp, however, in close pursuit.

The Celt had too often come in contact with the negro's hard head not to realize full well what it meant to be overtaken.

Therefore he made every effort to elude his pursuer. But Pomp was close upon him, when,

in desperation, Barney leaped over the air-ship's rail.

Down the street of the Chinese town they raced. They reached the corner of the pagoda and Barney dashed into the open gateway. But Pomp was upon him and was the means at that moment of saving his life.

The court-yard was a spacious one, and lighted with oil lamps. Not a Mongolian was in sight, but coiled up on the tiled floor was a monster snake, a venomous reptile of the cobra species.

How it came there, or for what purpose, the two skylarkers had no time to ascertain. Barney had almost stepped upon it, when Pomp grabbed him by the collar and pulled him back.

Another foot and he would have felt the reptile's fangs. Certain death would have been the result, for the cobra is the most venomous snake on earth.

It was possible that the monster was fostered by the heathen priests as a god of worship. However, this was, it seemed, unquestionably the autocrat of the place.

Forgotten at once was the object of the two jokers in invading the place. Pomp's eyes stuck out like agates and Barney's hair stood on end.

Both retreated to the gate.

"Golly!" gasped Pomp. "I done fink yo' las' hour had come, I'ish. I was suah dat yo' would step on dat snake."

"Bejabers, it was yez saved me from the baste," exploded Barney. "Howly mither! ain't he a big devil though?"

Both retreated from the temple and now quite sobered off made their return to the air-ship.

Barney went into the cabin for his rifle, with the intention of returning and shooting the reptile, but Frank interfered.

"No," he said, decisively. "That will not do. I have heard often that certain ignorant classes of the Hindoos worship the cobra. It may be that these people in this town have imbibed the same faith. It is my purpose to make friends with them if possible for certain politic reasons."

"How do you expect to do that, Mr. Reade?" asked Caleb Squeers. "It don't look as if they will ever dare to come near enough to us to make friends."

"Well, we must gain their confidence," replied Frank. "Of course the people of the town are of the better class of Chinese. They will hardly be in league with the pirates."

"That is true!"

"Then we can hope to gain their sympathy and much valuable information from them."

"Then it is your purpose to remain here until morning, Mr. Reade?"

"Certainly."

Even the superstition of the Chinese people relaxed sufficiently for them to venture back into the town by daylight.

But they kept at a safe distance from the air-ship. It was evident that there existed among them a diversity of opinion as to the nature of the invader.

Frank saw that it would not be difficult in daylight to restore their confidence. Watch was kept all night by turns on the air-ship's deck.

With the coming of daylight Frank decided upon a bold move.

Arming himself, he requested Barney to accompany him, and they left the Eclipse's deck.

Frank advanced boldly down the street of the little town. He could see frightened faces

peering at him from behind corners and various places of refuge.

He held up both hands and cried loudly in English:

"Have no fear. I am a friend."

Several times he repeated this cry. Then he had the satisfaction of seeing a number of the inhabitants, re-assured, emerge from their hiding places.

Frank succeeded in approaching quite near to them.

He used peaceful gesticulations and words. In a short time he had drawn quite a little crowd of the inhabitants about him.

But they yet regarded him with distrust, until, by a chance, one of their number came boldly forward and, to Frank's joy, exclaimed in broken English:

"Yoa Inglis'man?"

"Yes," replied Frank. "I speak English. I am an American."

"Melican man, allee samee," exclaimed the Chinaman, eagerly. "Me bin to Meliky. Me workee, washee, washee, gettee heap monee, come backee to Chinee."

"You are just the man I want to see," cried Frank, joyfully. "What's your name?"

"Me Sam Hop. What for Melican man stoppee here?"

"I came down here last night in my air-ship," replied Frank.

But Sam Hop looked puzzled. He shook his head.

"Me no unstancee," he said.

"Come with me and I will explain to you," said Frank, taking Sam Hop's arm and trying to lead him toward the air-ship. But the fellow's knees shook.

"No go!" he cried. "Debbil—debbil get Sam. Callee him off belly quick."

"Nonsense!" cried Frank. "You've seen a balloon, haven't you, Sam?"

"Allee samee big kitee? Fly in air likee bird?"

"That is it!" cried Frank, eagerly. "Well, that is what we came here in. It is like that, only goes with wings."

"No hurtee Sam?"

"No. Come along and tell your people that they will not be harmed."

By degrees Frank succeeded in re-assuring Sam Hop. He finally actually succeeded in getting him aboard the Eclipse.

Of course this overcame the fears of the other residents, and they ventured nearer. Soon they swarmed about the air-ship like bees. They regarded the Eclipse with great wonderment.

Of course the fact that Sam Hop could converse with the new-comers made quite a lion of him in the eyes of his countrymen.

This increased his confidence and swelled his vanity, and he became very talkative.

Finally Frank ventured to broach to him the subject upon which he desired information. To his joy, Sam Hop knew all about the Daisy affair.

"Me know!" he cried. "Chineeman he puttee up sign in allee towns say belly big monee for catchee pilates and hangee Wing Ho, an' sabee Melican people."

"Wing Ho!" cried Frank, excitedly. "Is that the name of the pirate leader?"

"Yep. Lun Wing Ho, bad man, killee heap people. Neber gib no one up no gib him muchee big monee."

"The same!" cried Frank, turning to Squeers and Dr. Vaneyke. "We are surely on the right track. Now, Sam, I want you to tell me where I can find Wing Ho and his piratical gang?"

Sam Hop shook his head slowly and solemnly. He made a dubious gesture.

"Melican man findee out China big contlee. No lailroads, no speakee ober wire, no findee man likee allee samee Meliky."

"Very likely not, Sam," replied Frank. "Just the same, I am here to find Wing Ho, and I intend to find him."

"Wing Ho allee samee Melican man," vouchsafed Sam Hop.

Frank was astounded.

"What!" he cried. "Do you mean to say Wing Ho is a white man—one of my people?"

"Yep!" replied Sam, briefly.

Frank was speechless for a moment.

"Are you sure of that, Sam?" he finally asked.

"Yep!" replied Sam, positively.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Frank Reade, Jr., "that explains the cunning methods of the pirates who have abducted the Daisy's party. If Wing Ho had been a real Chinaman he would long ago have killed the prisoners."

Frank continued to question Sam Hop.

Much valuable information was gained, even the locality of Boca Tigris, and how to reach the locality, which was supposed to be the pirates' haunt.

This was certainly great progress. But Frank was determined, if possible, to have Sam Hop accompany the party, as he would be invaluable as an interpreter.

He made the fellow a handsome offer, and to his surprise Sam quickly accepted it.

"Yep! Me go wif Melican man," he replied, eagerly. "Me likee findee pilate Wing Ho. Me gettee heap big monee."

"All right, Hop," cried Frank. "Jump aboard, my man. We will be off at once. Start the rotascopes, Pomp!"

Hop clambered onto the air-ship's deck with a great display of confidence. His townspeople regarded the move with awe. This tickled Hop's vanity, and for a moment he was all right.

But the transformation was sudden. The moment the air-ship began to move his courage failed him. Up shot the air-ship. But when two hundred feet from the earth Sam Hop's courage oozed right out of his yellow skin, and, with a wild yell of terror, before anybody could restrain him, he made a run across the deck and leaped over the rail.

A cry of horror escaped the lips of all on the air-ship's deck.

"My God!" cried Frank Reade, Jr., wildly. "Why didn't somebody stop him! He has gone to his death!"

CHAPTER VII.

ENCOUNTER WITH THE PIRATES.

OVER the rail went the terror-crazed Sam Hop. Only a fortunate and strange chance saved the foolish fellow's life.

To have fallen that distance to the earth would have been certain death.

But Sam Hop did not fall. As he cleared the rail his flying robe, being one of the loose sort, caught upon a projecting hook on the air-ship's side, and which held one of the steel bracing rods of one of the rotascopes.

There was a rending sound, and for a moment Sam seemed likely to become divested of the garment.

But it was of very tough material and held. There he hung head downwards between heaven and earth, but safe. He was saved by a lucky chance, indeed.

Of course everybody had sprung to the rail.

Their first sensations had been those of apprehension and even horror.

But now that it was seen that he was safe the comical sight he now formed changed the thing materially.

Everybody roared with laughter.

"Be me sowl, wud yez look at the Chinayser," howled Barney, holding his sides. "Did yez iver see anything so funny?"

"Fo' massy's sakes," exploded Pomp. "Dat am de berry funniest ting I eber did see in all my bo'n days."

Even Frank Reade, Jr., and staid Dr. Vaneyke were bound to laugh. As for Caleb Squeers, he had his note-book out instantly and was writing a sensational leader on the affair.

"If there was only a way to cable to the New York News Giver, I'd get a hundred dollars for this sketch," he said, regretfully.

But the situation was by no means funny to Sam Hop.

He kicked and squalled and bawled like a refractory baby hung up in its swaddling blanket.

"Melican man sabe poor Sam. Hop heap quick. Him die dead, him belly much hurtee, sabee quick, sabee quick."

This terrified utterance of the poor Celestial nearly killed his listeners with its laughter-provoking quality, but Frank Reade, Jr., now cried:

"Barney and Pomp, don't torture the poor fellow any longer. Pull him aboard and look out that he don't take another leap. Be careful."

The two servitors of the famous inventor knew when he was in earnest. At once they conquered their risibles and proceeded to draw poor Sam Hop in over the rail.

Then he was pacified as much as possible, though the poor fellow's terror was pitiable to witness.

He shook like a leaf in a gale of wind, and moaned in terror, but by degrees he recovered.

Now that the first shock was over, he began to grow reconciled to his position. At length he ventured to the rail and looked over.

Immediately after that, upon being assured by Frank Reade that he would surely return to the earth again, he became quite composed.

The air-ship went up a thousand feet and headed up the coast again.

The episode in which Sam Hop had figured had been seen by the village people below, and a glance down into its streets showed that they were in a state of the wildest excitement.

But the air-ship soon left the town out of sight. Steadily on its course for Boca Tigris it kept. At length Sam Hop was sufficiently recovered to direct Frank Reade.

It became his chief delight to sit by the rail and watch the face of the country below. He readily pointed out to Frank the different features in the landscape, and so it happened that when the air-ship was above the delta of a large river, the Chinaman sprang up, crying:

"Boca Tigris allee samee. See fort, town, allee ships, evyting, likee tellee Melican man!"

Frank saw quite a respectable city below him. The harbor was defended by a fort, and a number of Chinese junks were anchored in the mouth of the river.

"Good enough, Sam Hop!" said the young inventor, pleasantly. "Now, in what locality will we find the stronghold of Wing Ho and his pirate crew?"

Sam Hop was thoughtful a moment. He studied the country below for awhile with great care, and then said, slowly:

"Melican man go funder. Sam Hop tellee when stoppee. Slee?"

"All right," replied Frank. "It shall be as you say."

The air-ship moved on over the harbor and the fort. Soon they were left behind out of sight.

The country now began to undergo a change. The coast line was broken and rugged and diversified by little almost inaccessible bays.

The interior was hilly and barren. Few dwellings were visible, and it soon became evident that they were about to enter one of the least settled portions of the Chinese Empire.

Sam Hop eagerly watched the country below. Suddenly he started up with a sharp cry.

"Slee!" he cried, excitedly. "Me tink dey am Wing Ho's men. Ride fast horse allee samee."

Frank and Dr. Vaneyke appeared at the rail with their field-glasses. The Chinaman's meaning could be easily seen.

Below in a well beaten path, which led through the hills, fifty horsemen were galloping at full speed. They were dressed in the flowing robes of the Chinese, but were armed with guns and long swords.

It was evident that they had not seen the air-ship, for they did not look up or heed it. They were galloping at full speed.

"Are you sure they are Wing Ho's men?" asked Frank, sharply.

"Me no sure," replied Sam Hop. "Maybe am smugglers, pilates, allee same one sling, catchee Chinaman steal monee. Ship comee here, smuggle opium. Neber catchee smuggler, hidee in hills. Slee?"

"I see," said Frank, comprehending Sam's meaning. "Pomp, turn lever No. 7. We'll have a word with those horsemen before they get away from us, if possible."

"A'right, sir," replied Pomp, readily, as he turned the lever on the switchboard.

At once the rotascopes began to revolve more slowly, the vast wings at the sides of the air-ship were extended and it began to descend lightly.

Down it went, until scarcely two hundred feet above the heads of the galloping horsemen. Then the whirling of the rotascopes caused them to look up, and they saw the air-ship.

The effect was tremendous. One can imagine the sensations of these ignorant heathens who had never seen an air-ship before in their lives.

They were all desperate looking fellows, armed to the teeth. The settling down of the air-ship now gave their horses fright as well as themselves.

Probably fancying that their deity, the dragon, was about to swoop down upon them, the wretches yelled and tumbled from their horses, falling upon their faces on the ground.

Others urged the animals on at fearful speed, seeking to escape by flight. Several of the animals bolted and went over a precipice near to an awful death.

Down went the air-ship until it rested upon a level platform of stone.

Fully a score of the dismounted and superstitious Chinese outlaws were prostrated in terror before the fancied deity.

"Now, Sam Hop!" cried Frank, "talk to them."

"Yessee, me will," replied Sam, eagerly. "Tellee me whatee say."

"Can you recognize Wing Ho among that gang?"

"Me no see face," replied Hop. "Me no can tell."

"Evidently they think we are some supernatural beings. Speak to them and tell them to arise."

"Yessee, me do dat."

Sam Hop spoke to the prostrate Chinamen in their native tongue. At once they began slowly to uncover their faces and gaze blinkingly at the air-ship.

As soon as they saw that it was a structure of earthly material and that human beings and not spirits were visible on board, their confidence was in a great measure restored.

Sam Hop eagerly scanned the faces of all, and then turning to Frank Reade, Jr., said, disappointedly:

"No, me no slee Wing Ho. Velly solly me no slee him."

"Tell the rascals, then, to stand up in line and prepare to answer questions or we'll blow them to perdition," commanded Frank, sharply.

Sam Hop did so. The robber gang obeyed with alacrity, and then Sam, by Frank's directions, asked them questions.

But the replies were not satisfactory. The rascals professed not to belong to Wing Ho's band and knew absolutely nothing of the prisoners held for ransom. They asserted this very positively.

Now that their superstitious fear of the air-ship was well conquered, they were sullen and almost defiant. Frank read their game at once.

"They are all lying," he cried, angrily. Then he turned to Dr. Vaneyke, "but I don't see how we are going to force them to tell the truth. I never saw a more desperate hardened-looking set of human beings in my life."

"You are right," agreed the man of science. "I hardly know what to advise, Frank."

"I don't believe we shall succeed in extorting any from them. As for making them permanent prisoners, it is out of the question."

"Oh, of course!"

"Then we will not waste further time with them. Our only method is to find Wing Ho and his stronghold. There we will find the captives if they are yet alive."

The others did not demur at this decision. Caleb Squeers nodded his head in approval. Sam Hop indorsed Frank's suggestion.

Accordingly the order was given to Pomp, who set the rotascopes in motion. Up into the air shot the air-ship.

The Chinese pirates now seemed to have wholly recovered from their superstitious terror. Indeed, so much had their confidence been restored that they ventured to yell defiance to those on board the air-ship. This excited Sam Hop very much, who leaned over the rail and shook his fist at the outlaws, and would have thrown some heavy object down upon them but for the interposition of Barney.

"Let up wid yez foolin', Chinees," cried the Celt, as he seized Hop's pigtail and gave him a whirl which sent him spinning to the cabin door, where he collided with a tub full of dirty water and sat down plump into it.

When the Chinaman emerged from his enforced bath he was the picture of fury.

His eyes blazed with anger and he made a rush at Barney.

"Me killee Ilishman heap quick," he cried, furiously. "No foollee Chineeman, gettee allee dlownee, heap fool Ilishman, killee him quick."

Hop ran at Barney with his fingers spread claw-like. The nails were fully an inch long, and had they come in contact with Barney's

phiz that worthy's beauty would have been forever ruined.

But an incident occurred to prevent.

CHAPTER VIII.

ANCHORED IN THE WILDERNESS.

POMP had been standing in the pilot-house door. He and Barney were always embroiled and it might have been expected that he would have viewed Barney's discomfiture now with satisfaction.

But such was not the case.

The negro and the Irishman were the best of friends, and though they had spats of almost hourly occurrence, in which one played wicked snaps upon the other, they were really very fond of each other.

So it happened that when Pomp saw Barney likely to get the worst of his encounter with the Celestial, he did not stand by idly and enjoy Barney's defeat.

On the contrary, he made a spring across the deck, and let one foot slide out in the Chinaman's course.

This was an obstacle not to be despised, and the way that Hop went down upon his nose the next moment would have made a blind man laugh.

Barney glided quickly to the door of the engine-room and gave way to peals of laughter. Pomp retreated again to the pilot-house and did the same.

Barney's mouth, distended to its utmost capacity in his laughing fit, looked like an inviting cavern, and Pomp was unable to resist a temptation which at that moment assailed him.

Upon the shelf of the pilot-house window was a pile of oil waste. It was liberally saturated with the best of oil.

Quick as a flash Pomp grabbed a handful and let fly.

The darky was a dead shot, and the waste struck the Irishman full in the mouth. There was a gasp, a gurgle, and Barney went over two full back somersaults, and began to roll around the deck, trying his best to pull the nasty mess out of his throat.

The waste had completely filled the cavernous depths of the Celt's mouth. It was too comical for anything, and Pomp laughed until he got down on his knees from sheer weakness.

Sam Hop, who had recovered his equilibrium, and was holding on to his bruised nose, forgot his wrongs and entered into the humor of the situation.

He clapped his hands to his sides, and elevating himself upon his toes fairly danced with Celestial glee. It was fully two minutes before Barney got all the waste out of his mouth.

It had nearly strangled him, but when he did get upon his feet he was the maddest Irishman above the earth, for he was not at that moment upon it.

"Be the shades av me ancisters," he yelled, furiously, "phwativer did yez dare to do that to me for, yez misfit baboon. I'll have the loife av yez fer this."

Barney made a rush for Pomp, but the darky retreated into the engine-room and closed the door.

Barney tried to force it, but Hop came at him with a wet mop or swab which he had picked up, and began to belabor him over the head, yelling and howling the while in wild glee.

This was too much for Barney.

He was obliged to own up beaten and retreated in hot haste to the engine-room.

Sam Hop fairly rolled upon the deck in his delight.

"Hi la, muchee fun!" he cried, as Frank Reade, Caleb Squeers and Dr. Vaneyke all came on deck to learn the cause of all the racket.

"Ilishman pullee me pig-tail, setttee me down in water, makee me wet, black man heap quick chuckee Ilishman mouf full, him dancee, rollee ober, gettee out, me hittee heap hard, allee samee, heap funnee."

And Sam Hop went off into another convulsion of laughter. After this episode, the three became the best of friends, though Pomp and Barney could not refrain from continually roasting the poor, unsophisticated Chinaman.

The air-ship kept on for an hour. Nothing more was seen of the Chinese pirates until late in the afternoon, when a sort of long plateau was encountered.

As far as the eye could reach, it extended to the eastward. Though those on board the air-ship little suspected it, this was to be the theater of some exciting incidents.

Frank Reade, Jr., and Dr. Vaneyke were in the bow with their glasses scanning the plain, when a singular sensation was experienced.

The trained aeronaut would at once understand it. A sharp cry burst from Frank's lips. "My God! we are falling!" he cried. "What has happened to the ship?"

"We are lost!" cried Dr. Vaneyke.

At this instant an alarmed cry came from the pilot-house. It was Pomp, who shouted:

"Marse Frank, come quick! De rotascopes am nigh stoppin' ob dey own accord. Somefin's wrong."

Frank reached the pilot-house at a bound. They had not as yet gained alarming momentum in their downward course.

But it was certain that the rotascopes were upon the point of ceasing their revolutions.

To come in contact with the earth at the speed they were now falling, even though it might not mean death, would certainly damage the Eclipse.

Frank's first move was to throw out the wings which were intended to act as a parachute.

Then he put his hand on the rotascope lever and pushed it over to the point of highest speed.

But even this had no effect.

Certainly something was out of order with the mechanism of the Eclipse.

But the parachute wings saved the Eclipse from destruction. The next moment she struck the earth, but it was with a gentle shock.

Then the rotascopes ceased to revolve. The Eclipse had lost its power of ascent.

There the air-ship rested in the center of the mighty plain. The situation was not devoid of critical features.

All this had happened in a few brief minutes. Caleb Squeers and the others were at the door of the pilot-house filled with apprehension.

"What is the matter, Mr. Reade?" asked the correspondent, anxiously. "Has the air-ship given out?"

"So it seems," replied Frank, in a puzzled way. "At least it will not ascend."

"What is wrong?"

"I cannot say now. I hope nothing serious. I can tell by making an examination of the machinery."

Some excitement was created. Frank made a brief examination and then with Barney went below.

There the trouble was speedily located. One of the large glass reservoirs or storage vats of

water had cracked and the water had entirely escaped.

In the other jars the water had evaporated, so that not enough was left to generate the current necessary to run the dynamos. Here was indeed a calamity.

It was easy enough to replace the cracked storage jar. But water was not in sight for miles about. How were the jars to be filled?

To carry enough water the distance required would consume an immense amount of time and labor.

In the meanwhile the ship would be obliged to rest where it was until the jars could be filled. It was by no means a pleasant predicament.

"Glory fo' goodness!" ejaculated Pomp, in dismay. "I done look at dem jars yesterday, an' I felt suah dar was enuff water in 'em fer a long time yet."

"Bejabers, I did the same thing, naygur," cried Barney. "I'm thinkin' it's color blind we're afther getting."

"I was myself deceived," declared Frank Reade. "It is only a singular oversight. But it is easily explained. The corroding element in the jars left a water mark on the glass, and unless one actually placed his fingers in the water, or turned a strong light upon it, it was almost impossible to see how high the water was. Well, we're in a predicament now. The Eclipse is anchored until we can get the jars filled with water."

"And that seems to be a pretty scarce article hereabouts," declared Dr. Vaneyke.

"I don't believe there is water within five miles."

"What about the drinking tank? Is there not water enough in that?"

"I examined it yesterday," declared Frank. "There is hardly a gallon in it."

All returned to the deck. It was a dubious situation indeed, yet there was no way but to make the best of it.

Pomp and Barney volunteered to take pails and go in quest of a possible spring in the neighborhood.

Squeers desired to accompany them, but Frank demurred.

"It will not do to take any risks," he declared. "We are in an enemy's country. Two men are just as safe as three on the excursion."

Both Barney and Pomp were armed. They took the buckets and descended from the air-ship's deck.

The plain was covered with a short, wiry grass, which the sun had burned almost out of color. The soil was dry and parched.

As far as the eye could reach it was like a smooth floor.

There was not the least suggestion of running water, or even a lake or pond, much less a spring. The situation was certainly a dubious one.

But Barney and Pomp had not gone three hundred yards from the air-ship when a thrilling thing happened.

A pistol shot was heard on the air-ship's deck.

This was to be the signal for their return.

"Bejabers, I'm thinking we'll be afther gettin' back to the Eclipse!" cried Barney, stopping in his tracks. "Did yez hear that pistol shot, naygur?"

"Fo' suah, I'ish," replied Pomp. "I done fink it am all foolishness, though. I jes' reckon we could whip de whole gang ob dem Chinees. I amn't afraid ob dem."

"Bejabers, I'm not eyther," replied Barney. "But it's the ordhers av the boss, an' it's a

new sitiration we're be afther lukin' for, av we don't moind thim."

"A'right, I'ish. Yo' jes' leads de way. We'll go back. I'm drefful sorry, fo' I'd jes' like a scrap wif dem Chinees pirates."

"Whurroo! it's yerself as may be accommodated yet," cried Barney. "Perhaps yez might not loike it so well afther yez had thried it, me gossoon."

"I amn't 'fraid ob dat," snorted Pomp.

But back to the air ship the two doughty warriors went. The cause of the recall was perhaps not a justifiable one.

It was Dr. Vaneyke who had recalled them. The reason for it he pointed out with his finger.

"If my eyesight is not bad," he said, indicating the horizon, "somebody is coming this way."

Glasses were brought to bear upon a distant speck on the plain. It was seen to be a horseman, who was just coming at full gallop over a slight swell.

CHAPTER IX.

WILL DEANE'S STORY.

DR. VANEYKE'S eyesight was good. But when it was seen that the horseman was alone, it brought a cry of disgust from Barney and Pomp.

"Fo' goodness sake!" cried the latter, contemptuously, "am dat what yo' called dis chicken back here fo'? Why, me an' dat I'ish-man amn't 'fraid ob one man."

"Begorra, I should say not!" cried Barney, with distended eyes. "Do yez take us for cowards, docthor?"

"Not a bit of it," protested the doctor. "But I was fearful that there might have been others back of that one man."

Barney and Pomp were in favor of at once starting out again upon their mission for water, but Frank thought it best to restrain them.

"It will not be wise or safe," he said. "Remain here, by my order."

Thus vindicated, Dr. Vaneyke looked immensely relieved, but Barney and Pomp were crestfallen.

Sam Hop grinned at their humiliation, and Barney made a threatening gesture at him with his fist.

This did not intimidate Sam, however, though he turned away.

Everybody now was engaged in watching the approach of the distant horseman. Frank Reade, Jr., who had a powerful glass, was the first to make a startling discovery.

"As I live," he cried, "it is not a Mongolian, but one of our own countrymen!"

"You're right," cried Dr. Vaneyke, in thrilled tones. "Do you not believe that it is one of the Daisy's party?"

"Pray Heaven it is," cried Caleb Squeers, with wild excitement.

Then, for a time, no word was spoken. Not the least interested of all was Sam Hop, who stood by the rail and listened eagerly to all that was said.

Nearer and nearer the horseman came at a full gallop.

Then he was seen to suddenly draw rein as if in alarm at sight of the air-ship.

At that distance he probably took it for some sort of a dwelling, possibly the abode of some of the Chinese pirates.

"He is suspicious of us," cried Dr. Vaneyke.

"That is unfortunate," cried Caleb Squeers. "He will go by us. We must reassure him in some way."

"I will do it," cried Frank Reade.

He leaped down from the deck of the air-ship and began to walk towards the distant horseman.

He used his arms in gesticulations. For some while the horseman seemed to regard him with distrust.

Then when Frank was a few hundred yards from the air-ship, the stranger started up his horse and rode down towards him. As the horseman drew nearer, Frank saw that he was a tall, handsome youth, with a pallid face and shrunken frame, as if he had suffered great privation. At sight of Frank he seemed greatly overjoyed.

Seeing that he was a European like himself, the rider came up at full gallop and then leaped from his horse and stood before Frank.

Doffing his hat, he cried:

"Praise God, I am in the presence of one of my countrymen again! I know, sir, that you are an American, or at least an Englishman."

"You are right," replied Frank, readily, "I am an American. But what are you doing here in this wild waste?"

"I may well ask you the same question," retorted the young man. "But I will answer yours first."

"My name is Will Deane, and I am one of a yacht's party who were made prisoners by Chinese pirates off this coast not long ago. Our yacht was the Daisy and when off Boca Tigris, my two cousins, Mortimer and Myrtle Osborne and a friend named Jack Clark and myself were made prisoners by the pirates. We were taken aboard a Chinese junk, and the three sailors of our crew were murdered, while the yacht was scuttled and sunk."

"We have been held prisoners by the vilest crew of ruffians on the face of the earth. My companions are still prisoners, but two days ago I managed to escape."

"I killed one of the pirates and stole this horse. I have had nothing to eat for two days. My one hope is to reach Hong Kong, see the American consul and get a warship's crew to go to the rescue of my companions."

"Then your companions are yet alive?" asked Frank, eagerly.

"They were when I left them."

"Where, may I ask, was that?"

"A good ways from here," replied Will Deane, wearily. "None but a strong army can rout out the gang. They are entrenched in a powerful rock cavern, which is reached by a passage from the ocean to an underground sea, or harbor, and also by means of a passage reached by scaling the face of a high cliff far inland. I cannot tell you more. I must go on my way. I am glad to have met you. But what, may I ask, are you doing in this region? It is a country filled with dangers."

Frank Reade, Jr., looked steadily at the young man and replied:

"I am here to find you."

Pen cannot depict the amazement which was now the lot of Will Deane.

"To look for me?" he gasped.

"Yes."

"But—what do you mean? Who sent you?"

"Mr. Osborne and Mr. James Clark of New York."

Will Deane seemed quite overcome.

"God be praised!" he cried. "How many men have you with you?"

"Our party consists of five," replied Frank.

Will Deane's face fell.

"That is but a handful!" he cried. "You will need an army to overcome those Chinese pirates!"

"Well, I am strongly equipped," replied Frank.

"And what is that odd structure down there? It looks like a queer kind of pagoda. Is that your camp?"

"Just now," replied Frank, quietly. "But you are hungry and fatigued. Come with me and get recuperated. We will then talk over plans for the future."

"I am only too glad to accept that offer," said Will Deane, with alacrity, as he took his horse's bridle. "I will walk with you as it is but a short ways. But, pardon me! You have not yet given me your name?"

"I will do that with great pleasure. It is Frank Reade, Jr."

Will Deane stopped with a spasmodic gasp. "What!" he cried, in amazement. "Not the real Frank Reade, Jr.—the world-famous inventor?"

"The same," replied Frank, very quietly.

Will Deane for the first time smiled. Then he glanced at the air-ship.

"Well, I am getting to be a bigger fool every day of my life!" he cried. "Now I know that is your wonderful air-ship, which I mistook for a dwelling because it was on the ground."

"It is," replied Frank.

Will Deane staggered as if made giddy by the revelation.

"God be praised!" he cried. "You are the man to rescue my companions! Oh, I have heard much of your wonderful exploits, Mr. Reade. They will be sure of rescue. You cannot know how glad I am. God bless you for coming to our rescue, Mr. Reade!"

Deane was quite overcome with emotion, but he recovered before the air-ship was reached.

There he was presented to all on board. His coming was the means of producing intense excitement.

Caleb Squeers was beside himself, and went to pressing him with so many questions that Frank interposed, and after Deane had partaken of a hearty repast he was put to bed for much needed rest.

The horse was taken in charge by Pomp, and a clever idea had entered that darky's head.

"I jes' tell yo', I go to Marse Frank wif dat," he muttered.

So he went to Frank.

"Marse Frank!" he cried, excitedly; "I done got a splendid idee fo' to get water to fill up dem electric jars."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Frank. "What is it, Pomp?"

"I jes' take dat hoss ob dat chap's and gwine till I fin' watah, and den I fill up de pails an' come back. What yo' fink ob dat?"

"A very excellent idea, Pomp," replied Frank. "It is a pity that we haven't more horses. We could soon get water enough then."

"I jes' brung back a hull ribber, Marse Frank!" cried Pomp, excitedly.

In a few moments he emerged from the cabin with pails. These he had arranged in tiers from the horse's nethers, so that he could bring back at least six pails at one trip.

The return would necessarily be slow, for fear of spilling the water, but in going he could gallop as fast as he chose.

Of course Barney demurred and wanted to go, but this was out of the question.

So Pomp mounted his horse and rode away at full speed.

Soon he went out of sight, far over the plain. It was evident that they were a good ways from water.

Pomp rode on at full speed.

He carried a pocket compass to make sure of a safe return to the Eclipse.

After a long ride, water suddenly burst upon his vision. It was a small river fringed with trees.

So eager was Pomp to get the coveted water that he did not think of the surroundings.

He went down boldly to the water and began to fill the water pails. He had filled a number of them, when a startling sound smote upon his hearing.

It was the clatter of horses' hoofs, and he saw a gang of Chinese robbers, mounted and armed, bearing down upon him at full speed.

There was but one thing to do, and only a moment of time in which to do it.

Pomp was extremely loath to leave the water, but this was a case of necessity, and not choice.

The foe were close upon him. With a yell, he dropped the water buckets and leaped upon his horse's back.

A chorus of yells came from the mounted outlaws. Out over the plain shot pursued and pursuers.

A mad race was on. Pomp was a daring rider, and knew how to bear his horse up well. He kept a good lead of the pirates until the air-ship once more came in view.

If the darky should fail to reach the air-ship, it would mean death. He knew that his life was at stake, and exerted every nerve.

But the Chinese pirates seemed to be gaining upon him at every bound. Pomp's heart sank in his breast.

CHAPTER X.

BESIEGED BY THE FOE.

THE horse ridden by Pomp was game and made rapid progress. But the horses ridden by the foe were fresher.

The air-ship, however, was in sight. Pomp knew that if he could hold his own he would win yet.

Once the air-ship was reached he would be safe. At least his friends could likely hold the foe at bay long enough for him to get aboard.

And thus the mad race went on across the arid plain.

The Chinese outlaws spurred and lashed their horses to the utmost. Their yells were deafening as they tried to overtake their would-be victim.

But Pomp did not intend to be captured if he could help it.

He occasionally glanced over his shoulder at the foe and muttered with a chuckle:

"Hi dar, yo' jest got to ride a good race fo' to catch dis chile, an' don' yo' fo'git it."

There was now only a good mile between Pomp and the air-ship. The darky held his horse steady and kept cool.

But the outlaws had begun to gain rapidly. They were now so near they began to hurl javelins.

One of these passed so close to Pomp's head that a fraction of an inch closer would have brained him.

But, meanwhile, those on board the air-ship had caught onto the rumpus.

In an instant all was excitement.

Frank Reade, Jr., sprang into the cabin and came out with his rifle. This carried an explosive shell of his own invention, and was a deadly weapon at the distance of a mile.

Squeers and Barney, as well as Dr. Vaneyke, also went for their rifles.

They soon re-appeared and watched the race with apprehensions. Barney was quite beside himself.

"Begorra, I'll never see the naygur come to harrum!" he shouted, belligerently, "if I have to go out thar an' paste the divils all alone by mesilf!"

It was with great difficulty that Frank Reade kept the excited Celt on board the air-ship.

Sam Hop had watched the proceedings eagerly. He now approached Frank, saying:

"Melican man gib Sam gun, him shootee too. Me belly good shoot."

"Barney," commanded Frank, "get Sam a gun."

Barney obeyed the order, and the "Chinayser," as the Hibernian dubbed him, was made supremely happy.

It was at this juncture that it began to look as if Pomp would be overtaken.

Frank, fearful that this would be the result, now determined to throw a few of the explosive shells among the gang.

Accordingly he took aim and fired.

The shells struck one of the horses. It exploded with great force and three of the horses fell with their riders.

This was a wonderful shot and drew a cry of admiration from all on board the air-ship.

But this result had hardly been gained when there was another shot and one of the pursuing pirates fell from his saddle.

Frank and the others turned with astonishment, for no one else had thought of firing for fear of killing Pomp, and there was Sam Hop dancing like a dervish and caressing his smoking rifle.

"Hi la! Sam Hop shootee gleat stuff. Him hittee mark evly time. Neber fail killee pilate. Hi la!"

In a moment Barney had grabbed the gun from his hands.

"Phwy, yez gorilla-mouthed haythin' yel!" cried the Celt. "Didn't yez know better than to do that?"

Sam Hop was astonished.

"Me no harm," he whimpered. "Do allee samee Melican man. Killiee pilate."

"Yes, yez yaller haythin, but don't yez know that yez moight have hit the naygur?"

A gleam of comprehension emanated from the Celestial's eyes; he blinked at Barney in a knowing manner and said:

"Me no hittee black man—me hittee pilate. Ilishman mebbe hittee black man. Him no good shootee. Neber hittee mark."

Everybody roared at this, and Barney retreated crestfallen, giving Sam Hop back his gun.

"Bejabers, the Chinayser kin shoot," he admitted. "He did shpile that divil in foine shape."

The next moment Pomp came dashing up to the air-ship. But the pirates did not follow.

They had halted more than a thousand yards distant and were deliberating upon a plan of action.

The destructive shell thrown from Frank's rifle had intimidated them, and they were in a quandary as to what to do.

The noise of the shooting had brought Will Deane from his bunk to the deck.

He gazed in amazement at the gang of mounted pirates.

"Why, that is one of Wing Ho's divisions!" he cried, excitedly. "No doubt they have been scouring the plain in pursuit of me."

"Indeed!" cried Frank Reade. "Is this celebrated Wing Ho one of that crowd out there?"

"No," replied Will, after a critical glance. "He is not there. You would not fail to recognize him. He is many pounds heavier than

any ordinary Celestial and the worst specimen of a ruffian you ever set eyes on."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Frank again. "Is it true that he is an American?"

"Yes, and that is why I and my friends have been kept so long for a ransom. He is familiar with our mode of life, you know. He even knows Mortimer's father, and thinking him a millionaire, believes that he will extort from him a handsome ransom."

"Strange!" exclaimed Frank. "How can a white man affiliate with such a low class of heathens?"

"Ah, Wing Ho, or Chester Wing, as his real name goes, is capable of anything vile or mean under the sun. He is a most notorious crook, and the worst man that ever served in Sing Sing."

"Then he is a graduate of that institution?"

"He escaped from that prison. He is owing nineteen years there for manslaughter. Here he is wholly beyond the reach of the law."

"Does not the Chinese government make some effort to exterminate these pirates?"

"Ah, they have tried it for years, only to fail. The pirates on this coast are demagogues on their own territory. No effort has yet resulted in uprooting them."

"I cannot understand that."

"Well, it is not such a difficult task for them to hold at bay and even destroy any ordinary force sent here against them. When one stronghold is uprooted another springs up in a new quarter."

"Indeed!"

"They are a numerous gang. They have ships and arms and strongholds as invulnerable as Gibraltar. Again, they are not wholly pirates of the sea. They are land pirates as well, and as many of them rove about on land, robbing travelers and committing crimes of all sorts. Wing Ho is one of their most powerful chieftains."

"But, can they not be uprooted?" asked Frank.

"Yes, I believe they can, and you are the man to do it, Mr. Reade. With your air-ship, you have the advantage of any land or sea force. I think you can, almost single-handed, literally exterminate them."

"I will give them a lesson before I am through, if possible," said Frank.

"And you can do it. All you have to do is to sail aloft over their ships and blow them out of the water with bombs. Then their stronghold you can batter down with heavy cans of dynamite launched from a thousand feet in the air. Oh, you have an engine of warfare in your air-ship, Mr. Reade, not to be despised. It beats anything. But you are well enough aware of that."

"Perhaps so," agreed Frank. "But I would like to ask you a few questions, Mr. Deane."

"Well?"

"This stronghold of Wing Ho, you say, is a mighty cavern?"

"Yes."

"And his ships can sail into it?"

"They can. It is like a vast high-roofed grotto. There is a safe harbor within where the pirate vessels can ride safely at anchor."

"That is remarkable."

"Yes, it sounds like old time romance. But I know it for I have seen it. Every few days a captured prize is brought into the grotto. Sometimes a Chinese merchant ship, and again some foreign vessel. Oh, these Chinese pirates are the worst that ever sailed the seas. What is worse, they are quite well protected. They are hand in glove with their fellow miscreants,

the smugglers, and the latter are in league with some of the prominent government officials in Canton and Hong Kong."

"Well," said Frank, drawing a deep breath, "that is all right, but when they capture citizens of the United States and hold them for ransom, it is time for America to become interested. This Mr. Chester Wing or Wing Ho deserves to hang, and his villainous career shall be brought to an end before I leave the Flowery Kingdom."

At this moment loud yells of joy were heard from the pirates out on the plain.

The reason for this was obvious.

There had appeared from the eastward another immense body of the miscreants.

They were also mounted and were at least five hundred strong. Frank Reade, Jr., observed the coming of this vast force with a chill of apprehension.

The situation was fast becoming a desperate one.

It was impossible to raise the air-ship without having first filled the storage jars. On the other hand, it was now impossible to send to the river for water.

In its present position the air-ship was almost at the mercy of the Chinese pirates.

Had there been any electric current of which he might make use, Frank could easily have held a thousand of the gang at bay by using deadly wires.

But as it was, they had only their rifles to depend upon.

They were but a handful opposed to the mighty force before them. By mere weight of numbers the besieging force could overwhelm them.

None realized the gravity of the situation better than Frank Reade.

The pirates had now come up and surrounded the ship. Our adventurers were really besieged.

What was to be done?

Certainly something must be devised at once to save the air-ship from the destruction which threatened. But every expedient suggested seemed futile.

It certainly seemed as if the Eclipse and its brave crew was doomed.

CHAPTER XI.

A PITCHED BATTLE.

ANY one possessed of a less steady nerve and clearer head than Frank Reade, Jr., might have made a fatal mistake in this serious predicament.

But the famous inventor had no idea of succumbing to the fate which threatened.

"The air-ship must be got out of the way," he mused. "But how? The storage jars must be filled in some way."

He looked up at the sky as if to invoke a flood of water. In vain he tried to think of some expedient.

Meanwhile, the pirates seemed in no hurry to force the battle.

Night was at hand, the shades of darkness fast settling down, and they were preparing the camp.

Frank drew a breath of relief.

"They don't mean to attack us to-night," he cried. "The morrow may bring us something."

But the words were barely out of his mouth before Will Deane cried:

"You are mistaken, Mr. Reade. They do mean to attack us."

"What?" cried Frank.

"Look there!"

Sure enough, a line of the Chinamen, with

their long guns and gleaming swords, were advancing over the plain.

It was really a skirmish line, the object of which was to test the strength of the foe.

At once the defenders of the Eclipse prepared for the attack.

Everybody, with their rifles, went to the loopholes. On came the line of men, and then a line of fire leaped forth, and the roar of their rifles was heard.

The bullets rattled against the steel hull of the Eclipse. But not one of our adventurers was hurt.

They were protected by the steel shell, which shed the bullets easily.

"Hold your fire!" cautioned Frank. "Wait until they come near enough."

The order was obeyed. On came the line of Chinese pirates, firing as they came.

But our adventurers held fire until the foe was within one hundred yards of the air-ship.

Then the pirates gave a mad yell and charged upon the Eclipse.

"Now!" cried Frank, in a ringing voice. "Give it to them! Fire!"

Crash!

The volley which followed was a fearful destructive one. The line of pirates were mowed down like wheat before the sickle blade.

Once again the repeaters were worked. Another volley staggered the line and threw it into confusion.

Some of the pirates reached the rail of the air-ship. A few tried to clamber aboard.

But they were shot down like sheep. The ground was covered with the dead pirates.

The shells from Frank's rifle were especially deadly. But nothing could stand up before such a fire.

The line wavered and broke. In confusion most dire the cowardly gang turned and fled.

It was a brilliant repulse for the crew of the air-ship. Not one of them had received a scratch.

Barney proposed three cheers, and they were given with a will.

Sam Hop was the most delighted one of all. He danced and sang in literal glee.

"Pilates no good. Heap poor stuff," he cried, jeeringly. "Me likkee 'em evly timee. Slee 'em run likee allee samee heap fool."

The discomfited pirates retreated to a safe distance. They did not venture another attack.

They must have suspected that something was wrong with the air-ship.

But not one of them dreamed that it was possessed of the power to sail in the air.

They regarded it as some sort of a vehicle, the manner of propulsion being but a vague matter to them.

Camp fires were soon gleaming in all directions. Our friends were literally surrounded.

"That is all right," cried Will Deane, confidently. "They will attack us again to-morrow and then we will just annihilate them."

A good watch was posted on board the air-ship that night.

But Chinamen, unlike Indians, are not good scouts. No stratagem was attempted.

When morning came they were in the same position. Those on board the air-ship were astir at an early hour.

An attack was anticipated, but it did not come.

Not that day did the Chinese pirates make an attack upon the air-ship. Another night was passed and the second day Frank comprehended their motive.

He also realized the very desperation of their situation.

"They mean to starve us out," he declared. "That is certainly their game. It is a bad outlook for us."

"You are right," echoed Dr. Vaneyke. "We shall all soon die of thirst; there is not a drop of water aboard."

The situation was indeed appalling. It was discussed in executive council.

All manner of schemes were suggested. It was finally decided that the only way was to make a sally and try to defeat the foe in open field.

This, however, would be almost suicidal. In the face of such overpowering numbers the result could not be doubtful.

But at this supreme moment of doubt the pirates made a little diversion.

Suddenly one of them was seen bearing a white flag. At once Frank Reade stepped out upon deck.

The truce-bearer, a giant ruffian of the lowest Chinese type, advanced until within speaking distance, and then addressed Frank in Chinese:

The famous inventor could not understand this, so he called Sam Hop out as interpreter.

The colloquy which ensued was amusing as well as interesting.

Sam Hop and the truce-bearer harangued for a few moments. Then Hop turned to Frank and said:

"Pilate man say, Melican man surrender. If not he killee quick."

"Oh, that is what he says, is it?" exclaimed Frank. "Ask him if he is one of Wing Ho's precious gang."

Hop obeyed this injunction.

"Nope!" he replied, interpreting the truce-bearer's answer. "Him say, Lieu To, chief allee same. Me tink big lie."

"So do I!" cried Frank. "You tell him, Hop, that we decline to surrender. That if he doesn't take himself out of the way with his murderous gang, we will annihilate them."

"Yep," replied Sam, readily. "Me tellee him so, allee lightee."

The effect of this declaration upon the truce-bearer was peculiar. He argued with Hop for a time and then went away sullenly.

"What did he say to you?" asked Frank, after the miscreant had gone.

"Him tellee me, play tick on you, help him killee you, gib me big monee. Me tellee him, heap fool Chineeman. Neder do sich foolish ting."

"Good for you, Hop!" cried Frank, heartily. "You will never regret sticking by us, I can assure you."

From this time on Frank Reade, Jr., had unlimited confidence in Sam Hop.

Meanwhile, the truce-bearer had retired to the camp of the pirates. Loud shouts and angry yells greeted his report to his fellow villains.

Then it was seen that the pirates were about to make a fresh attack upon the Eclipse.

Reade was still dubious as to the result.

"Oh, for water!" he groaned. "I don't see why we were so careless as to let those jars get empty. If I could only get the dynamos into working order we would quickly spoil their little game."

But as matters were, it seemed that the only way was to meet the foe with the repeating rifles and trust to them alone.

Accordingly the loopholes were opened and every man armed with a repeater stood by one.

The situation was not wholly without a

species of fascination such as the soldier is sometimes said to experience upon the battle-field.

The Chinese pirates this time evidently meant a victorious attack.

They were massed in great force and advanced upon the Eclipse in the shape of a triangle. But their close lines was a fatal mistake.

"Wait until you can almost see the color of their eyes," cried Frank, "then give it to them."

The command was obeyed. The Chinamen advanced slowly until within a hundred yards of the air-ship.

Then with a wild yell they started on the charge.

At fifty yards Frank gave the command to fire.

A sheet of flame leaped from the air-ship's side. Just as fast as the repeaters could be worked, a storm of bullets poured into the ranks of the foe.

Nothing human could well withstand that withering fire.

The shots of the Mongolians were without effect for they struck the metal sides of the air-ship and rattled off harmlessly.

In vain they tried to reach the air-ship's rail. The front ranks were mowed down in heaps.

Nothing could stand up before such a deadly fire. In wildest confusion the pirates broke ranks and fled.

Fully half a hundred of their number were left dead upon the plain.

Thus ended most disastrously the second attack upon the air-ship. Another was not essayed at once.

The miscreants contented themselves with remaining at a distance and yelling in a savage manner. They fired repeatedly at the Eclipse but the shots could do no harm.

The inmates of the air-ship of course felt elated with their victory. But they were as yet in a dubious position.

It was not safe to sally forth from the air-ship; yet all were suffering from thirst. A dearth of water was akin to starvation, and they would die like rats in a trap unless some method was devised to overcome this difficulty.

The Mongolians now seemed to have abandoned the idea of carrying the air-ship by weight of numbers.

They had settled down complacently in camp, and it was now easy to see that their purpose was to starve the crew of the Eclipse into a surrender.

A surrender would be equivalent to death. Frank Reade, Jr., realized this.

"My God!" he reflected; "something must be done! There must be some way to get water!"

He sat down and began to think. Then he sprang up with a great cry.

"What a fool I am!" he ejaculated. "Of course it is the easiest thing in the world to get water in that way!"

CHAPTER XII.

ESCAPE.

AN idea had occurred to the famous inventor which was so simple and perfectly natural withal that he was astonished at his failure in not having discerned it before.

A great change came over him.

He went down into the air-ship's hold. Here he used a pocket lantern until he found a slide in the metal bottom of the air-ship.

This he opened and stepped down upon the ground beneath. He picked up a handful of the soil and examined it.

"There is no doubt plenty of water a few feet under this soil. It is the solution of the difficulty."

Then he called Pomp and Barney down into the place.

"Bring picks and shovels!" he commanded.

"Shure, an' phwat's up now, Misther Frank?" cried Barney. "Is it a tunnel yez will be after diggin' out under the blatherskites and blowing them all up in a heap with dynamite?"

"I had not thought of that, Barney. Not a bad scheme," replied Frank. "But I don't think we'll try it. Bring your shovels and dig down here until you come to water. That is what we want."

Barney looked dumfounded.

"Shure, it's a well yez want, Misther Frank," he cried. "An' why didn't anny av us think av that afore. Ha, ha, ha! av course it's the cheapest way to get wather! Well, I niver!"

Everybody else on board felt like kicking themselves for not having thought of this simple method before.

"Well, that is very odd," declared Dr. Vaneyke. "Why, we might have been many miles from here by this time."

"There is a possibility that we may not get water even by digging a well," said Frank. "But I do not fear such a contingency. I am quite sure that a few feet down in that soil we will find an abundance."

Barney and Pomp went to work with a will. They wielded the pick and shovel with great skill.

They were quite sheltered from the observation of the foe and were therefore quite safe.

Foot after foot of the earth was thrown up. Before long the two shovelers had dug a hole deep enough to conceal both.

Their heads were below the level of the plain. Fully six feet deep the well was and yet there were no signs of water.

"We will reach water at ten feet," declared Dr. Vaneyke, as he examined the soil with his fingers.

"We can find no fault with that," said Frank Reade, Jr. "If we do not have to go deeper I shall be well satisfied."

Barney and Pomp now reached the ten foot mark. But yet no water had appeared.

Dr. Vaneyke was dismayed.

"Never mind!" he cried. "It will certainly come very soon."

It became necessary now to use buckets. But all lent a hand at this, and as fast as Barney and Pomp filled them, they were hauled up by the others and emptied.

In this way the well reached the depth of fifteen feet.

Barney struck his pick into the earth and a slight flow of water followed.

A cheer went up at this announcement.

"A few feet more," declared Dr. Vaneyke. "Give way with a will, boys."

At exactly eighteen feet a great jet of water spouted into the well. A heavy vein had been struck, and in a few moments the two diggers were up to their knees in the welcome liquid.

They were drawn up out of the well. Then a line was lowered several times in the course of an hour, which finally showed three feet of water in the well.

There was now no reason why this should not be utilized. It was allowed a reasonable length of time to settle, then a pipe was lowered and attached to a hand-pump.

In a short while the tank was filled, and also the storage jars. Frank was not long in getting the dynamos into running order.

By this time darkness had settled down over the plain.

"You will not attempt to leave here until morning?" asked Dr. Vaneyke of Frank.

"Yes, I shall leave at once," said Frank, positively. "We can afford to take no more chances. Why, the miscreants might creep up on us in the darkness and overwhelm us."

"But—shall we travel far by night?"

"Why not? We have the compass to guide us. But it is hardly likely that we shall make more than twenty miles before daybreak. I shall run the propellers slowly."

Frank now connected the different parts of the machinery with the dynamos, and the electric current was turned on.

Pomp took his station once more in the pilot-house, and Barney went to the engine-room.

The Eclipse was once more all right, and good care was taken to have the storage jars well filled.

The night was pitchy dark. Far out on the plain the gleam of the camp-fires of the foe could be seen.

But they did not dream of what was going on on board the air-ship.

If they had, it was safe to say that their emotions would have been of a different sort.

Suddenly, by Frank's order, Pomp set the rotascopes whirring.

With a mighty rush the Eclipse sprang up into the air. Up three hundred feet it shot.

Far below could be seen the camp-fires of the foe.

An idea occurred to Frank.

He sprang to the search-light and turned on the current.

"I'll give them a little scare," he cried. "Just see the fun."

The famous inventor's prediction was not far wrong. The search-light's blinding pathway of light, suddenly turned down upon the foe's camp, was a most startling development for them.

They were thrown into a state of the wildest confusion and excitement.

Of course by glancing upward they could not see the Eclipse in the face of that powerful glare.

But it was to their ignorant minds as if some supernatural power on high had launched a blinding glare down upon them, and they could ascribe to it nothing less than certain destruction.

Men were seen running hither and thither wildly.

Many fell upon their faces in abject terror, others mounted their horses and dashed madly away. It was a ludicrous as well as thrilling scene, and was viewed by our aerial navigators with keen enjoyment.

When he had thoroughly demoralized the wretches in this way, Frank dropped a few bombs down among them.

The effect was terrific. In a twinkling the camp was broken up, and the pirates were fleeing madly for their lives.

Satisfied with this punishment, Frank shut off the search-light and went to the pilot house.

Here he set the air-ship's course.

Nobody felt like retiring early that night. The air was cool and bracing, and all sat on deck discussing the incidents through which they had just passed.

"Oh, by the way!" cried Will Deane, suddenly turning to Pomp; "what did you do with my horse?"

"Golly, Marse Deane! I done turn him loose

on de plain," replied Pomp. "I jes' fink he take care ob hisself."

"That was proper," said the young yachtsman. "These Chinese horses are of a Tartar breed, and all quite able to take care of themselves if given their liberty, even in a barren country."

The Eclipse was drifting slowly through a mass of fleecy clouds, and Caleb Squeers had been entertaining the crowd with one of his comical yarns, when Dr. Vaneyke suddenly exclaimed:

"As I live, Frank, I believe we are over the salt water."

A glimmer of water far below was plainly seen. Also a sharp cry escaped all.

Lights were seen flashing upon the bosom of the heaving sea far below. The outlines of two ships could be faintly distinguished.

This much was discerned when a startling incident ensued.

There was a sudden flash of brilliant light, and the distant boom of a cannon. Then plainly to the hearing of those on board the air-ship there came the loud yells and cries and crashing blows of a combat.

In an instant the Eclipse's crew were in a state of excitement.

Every man was upon his feet, and Dr. Vaneyke cried:

"It is a fight between two ships. I will wager it is the work of the Chinese pirates."

"We will soon know," said Frank.

He sprang to the search-light. The next moment the scene below was rendered as plain as in broad daylight.

Dr. Vaneyke's surmise had proved correct.

It was indeed a fight between the pirates and a ship of noble size and which carried the flag of England.

The pirates' junk lay alongside the English ship.

It was a thrilling sight. The rails of the two ships were covered with fighting men. The smoke and din of battle was terrific.

But the pirates were seen to be the stronger force. It was beyond doubt that they would surely overcome the English crew.

The result was easy to reckon. A general massacre and the looting of the ship would follow.

The nefarious deed was one of common occurrence on that coast. Many a noble merchant ship lay fathoms deep in the waters of the Yellow Sea with crew and all on board.

It made Frank Reade, Jr.'s blood boil. He watched the conflict but a moment.

Then he turned quickly.

"Barney and Pomp!" he cried, "bring me a dozen of the electric bombs!"

The two servitors flew to obey the order. It was but a short time before they returned.

"Teach them a royal lesson, Frank!" cried Dr. Vaneyke.

Everybody was agog with interest and excitement.

Caleb Squeers had his note-book out and was making a sketch of the scene.

Frank Reade, Jr., stepped to the rail of the Eclipse.

He held one of the deadly electric bombs in his hand.

"I will blow the wretches out of existence," he declared, vengefully. "It is a fate they deserve."

Then with precision he dropped one of the bombs on the deck of the pirates' junk.

The effect was terrific!

CHAPTER XIII.

SAM HOP'S PECULIAR EXPERIENCE.

THE bomb dropped by Frank Reade, Jr., as seen in the search-light's glare, dropped full upon the deck of the pirate junk.

A terrific explosion followed, and a vast orifice was torn in the deck. The pirates were hurled right and left, and many were killed.

A cheer went up from those on the deck of the air-ship.

The effect upon the pirates was fearful. They looked up and could see nothing only a blinding glare of light.

Out of this came those terrible bombs like the destructive bolts of Jove. Their terror was wonderful to witness.

The grapplings between the two ships broke and they drifted apart. The English ship sped away in the darkness as if glad to escape.

But Frank Reade, Jr., had not done with the junk yet. He called to Barney who came up out of the cabin with a long coil of electric wire.

This, by Frank's orders, Barney paid out over the rail until it had trailed in the water far below. Then Frank put on a pair of insulated gloves and connected the other end of the wire with the air-ship's dynamos.

Holding the wire free of the rail, Frank turned a key which sent the deadly current into it.

"We will fix them this time," he said to Dr. Vaneyke, who stood by, watching him curiously.

"Are you going to kill the whole gang, Frank?" asked the scientist. "Will you not spare some of them?"

"Why should I?" cried the famous inventor.

"They are murderers and it is but justice that we are dealing them."

"You are right," agreed the doctor. "They cannot be dealt with too severely."

By Frank's command the air-ship now moved forward a slight ways. This drew the wire across the hull of the pirate junk.

The result was thrilling. The wood of the vessel ignited like punk beneath the influence of the fierce current.

In a moment the flames burst upward and the ship burned like a rag saturated with kerosene. From fore to aft, from hull to masthead they ran riot.

Such of the wretches as were not overtaken by the flames, leaped overboard to be drowned in the sea. It was a fearful act of retributive justice.

Then Frank shut off the current, Barney drew in the wire, and the air-ship went on its way. Truly the pirates had a terrible Nemesis upon their track now.

Sam Hop had witnessed the terrific scene with awe and mystification. When darkness shut the tragedy from view, he drew himself up and slunk into the cabin.

"Melican man he heap debbil," he muttered, with conviction. "Chineeman he no stane muchee show. Killee quick, burnee up allee samee fire."

Barney overheard this soliloquy. He at once seized the opportunity for what he considered a good joke.

The air-ship was now making good headway, and there was nothing to interfere with her course.

The excitement was all over, and everybody had gone below. It was an excellent chance, and the Celt embraced it.

He stepped into the pilot-house and touched Pomp on the shoulder. The darky grinned as Barney detailed the proposed joke to him.

"Golly, dat am a big chaine fo' some fun,"

he agreed, with glee. "Jes' yo' count dis yer chicken in fo' dat. I se wid yo', honey."

Poor Sam Hop never dreamed of what was coming. His bunk was in the forward cabin, and near Barney and Pomp. It had been his intention to retire, but Pomp called him on deck on a slight pretext, and held him there while Barney went below and fixed up the little game for poor Sam Hop.

Pretty soon Barney reappeared and gave Pomp the wink. The darky at once cut Hop's society and went back to the pilot-house. After a time, the Mongolian once more started to retire.

The events of the day had somewhat wearied Hop, and he was anticipating a good, sound sleep. He quickly divested himself of his outer garments, and then placing his hands upon a metal rail, he swung himself into his bunk.

In getting in or out of the bunk, Sam always found it necessary to grab hold of this iron rail. This fact Barney was well aware of.

Not but a few yards away, ensconced behind a screen, were the two jokers, already splitting with inward laughter over the prospective success of their scheme.

Barney held under his arm a machine which the average schoolboy would have at once identified as a magic lantern.

"Is yo' ready, fish?" whispered Pomp. "I done fink de lamb am ready fo' de slaughter."

"Begorra, thin, here goes!" cried the Celt, as he turned on the light.

In an instant, reflected on the panel just over Sam Hop and directly in front of his eyes, was a grotesque-looking face, with glaring eyes, open jaws, and an aspect of terrible sort. The poor Celestial gave one look at the frightful apparition, and firmly convinced that it was the incarnate fiend himself, with a mad yell of terror sprang up and seized the rail to swing himself out of the bunk.

But Barney had connected the rail with a lightly charged wire. The poor Chinaman got a good grip on the rail, but there he was held fast.

As in a vise he was held, and in vain he tried to free himself. His terror was beyond expression. The apparition had gone, for Barney had closed the lantern slide, and he and his colleague Pomp were rolling on the floor convulsed with silent laughter.

While poor Sam Hop was yelling and howling with terror and trying to break his grip on the rail, suddenly Barney shut off the current and Sam Hop, freed, gave one leap and went flying out on deck.

Of course the racket had brought Frank Reade, Jr., Dr. Vaneyke and everybody else out of the main cabin.

They rushed on deck to find poor Sam Hop in a state of terror bordering on insanity, while Barney and Pomp were nowhere to be found.

The truth was, the two jokers were so convulsed with laughter that they dared not show themselves for fear of betraying the game.

The only clear explanation Sam could give Frank was by no means lucid.

"Debbil in Chineeman's bed!" he cried, trembling as with an ague. "Sam Hop catchee hold, hangee on, neber lettee go. Debbil after Sam, wantee go back, neber go wid Melican man, debbil gettee him!"

"Pshaw!" cried Frank, reassuringly. "There is nothing on board to hurt you, Hop. Upon my soul, I believe those two rascals, Barney and Pomp, have been playing roots on you. I'll find out."

Frank went to the cabin stairway and called sternly for Barney and Pomp.

"Ay, sor, here I am!" cried Barney, appearing on the scene with as innocent a mug as one might expect to see.

"Does yo' want me, Marse Frank?"

Here was Pomp, looking as innocent as a lamb. Frank looked hard at the two jokers.

"Look here, boys," he said, sharply. "I don't want you to molest Sam Hop again. Do you understand that?"

There was a tell-tale twinkle in Barney's eye as he replied:

"Shure, Misther Frank, don't yez iver believe that I'd hurt the Chinayser for me loife. I think as much ov him as I do me mither-in-law; bejabers, that's thue!"

"Fo' de Law's sake, Marse Frank!" protested Pomp. "I wouldn't hurt dat chile fo' anything. We's jes' as good frien's as a cat an' a mouse."

"I see the guilt right in your faces, you rascals," cried Frank, suppressing a laugh in spite of himself. "But, understand it, this roasting business has got to stop. We'll have no more of it on this ship."

With much dignity, Frank told Hop that it was only an unkind joke played on him by the two rascals and that if he would go back to bed now he would be troubled no more. In this way the terrified Celestial's fears were calmed and peace once more reigned.

No sooner had this been accomplished, however, when a startling thing occurred. There was a terrific crash and the Eclipse shook from stem to stern.

Everybody was thrown violently upon their faces, and for a moment it seemed as if everything was going to destruction.

CHAPTER XIV.

A STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE.

THE shock was a terrific one. Everybody was for an instant stunned, and when Frank Reade, Jr., managed to regain his feet, the Eclipse rocked like a ship at sea.

"My God! What was that?" cried Dr. Vaneyke, the first to recover himself. "We are going to destruction."

"No, no!" cried Frank Reade, Jr., excitedly. "The ship yet floats. To the wheel, Pomp! Throw out the search-light—lively!"

The famous inventor's order was quickly obeyed. Pomp was at the wheel instantly and Barney at the search-light.

The ship was now on a steady keel and the rotascopes were revolving all right and the propeller doing its duty. What had caused the shock?

"What was it?" cried Will Deane. "Did we strike anything?"

"I don't see how we could at this altitude," replied Frank. "It is more likely that some missile has struck us. Perhaps some ship below has fired a cannon ball at us."

"If so, then the air-ship is likely to be seriously damaged," cried Dr. Vaneyke.

"The search-light will tell the story."

This was true. Barney now had the search-light in working order. Its rays were turned downward. All gave an exclamation of surprise at the sight revealed.

The water was no longer beneath them. A wild, rocky country, broken into mountain ranges, lay below.

The Eclipse now sailed above one of the crags not fifty feet from its summit. The shock was at once explained.

In some way the air-ship had drifted from her course, and passing over the mountains at

an insufficient altitude, it had collided with the crags and only by what was a lucky chance had escaped wreck and demolition.

Examination of the chart and the compass showed that the small pin, by which the rudder was set in the pilot-house, had shifted fully six degrees. This had set the air-ship's course inland.

Had Pomp remained at his post, no doubt the accident would not have happened. But at that altitude when over the sea it was very often customary to set the air-ship's rudder, as the helm of a ship is lashed at sea.

Frank went down into the hold with an electric lantern, and made an examination of the air-ship's hull.

There was nothing to indicate that the Eclipse had been done any great injury, so far as the hull was concerned. There was a few dents in the platinum shell, but these were of little consequence.

As Frank clambered out of the hold, however, a loud cry of alarm came from the deck above.

In an instant the young inventor sprang up the stairs, and met Dr. Vaneyke. The scientist's face was pallid, and his manner extremely excited.

"What's the matter?" asked Frank, sharply.

"Something is wrong with the machinery," replied the savant. "We are sinking."

Frank instantly realized this from the peculiar feeling. The air-ship was certainly sinking though not rapidly.

He sprang into the pilot-house and inspected the electric key board. They were all in excellent working order.

Then he went down into the engine-room. There he found Barney vainly endeavoring to adjust a broken journal to one of the pivots upon which revolved the drum which kept the rotascopes in motion.

The fragments of the journal had become wedged in such a manner that the revolutions of the drum was slow and uncertain. Barney was trying to remove these fragments but without success.

Frank saw at once with a feeling of relief that the injury was only temporary and easily repaired.

Of course, it would necessitate a descent and some hours of labor, possibly the loss of half a day's time. But the journal could be replaced with a perfect one and then the air-ship could go on again.

Seeing this, Frank sprang back again to the deck. He turned the search-light downward. They were just above a broad shelf which jutted out from the mountain side.

Down upon this they settled. The Eclipse struck the ground with a little shock and the rotascopes ceased to revolve.

Of course it was unfortunate that the accident should have occurred. Yet, on the other hand, it was a matter of congratulation that worse had not happened.

The darkness was fast giving way to the light of day. Until it should come it was impossible to tell with any degree of certainty beyond the rays of the search-light just what sort of a region was about them.

But the immediate question was the repairing of the broken journal.

A new journal was procured from the store-room, and Barney and Pomp set at work to adjust it, under Frank's direction.

It promised to be the job of only a few hours, and they were making famous progress when a loud cry came from the deck in Dr. Vaneyke's

"Frank, come up here, quick!"

The young inventor responded at once. When he reached the deck he saw that daylight had made all about clear and distinct. The scene was a striking one.

The country was fearfully rough and rocky. As far as the eye could reach, all was a series of unbroken mountain crags and valleys. The Eclipse rested upon a rocky shelf overlooking a deep valley.

The descent into this was most precipitous. Yet along a narrow path a number of horsemen were rapidly making their way.

there's no way but to fight. Everybody on deck, armed and ready to repel an assault!"

Dr. Vaneyke went hastily after his rifle. Barney and Pomp left their work, for it was more necessary to defend the air-ship, and Will Deane suddenly came on deck with a startling report.

"Where is Squeers?" he asked, apprehensively. "I have searched the ship over for him and can find no trace of him anywhere."

"Squeers!" exclaimed Frank Reade, Jr. "What does it mean? Now I call to mind. I haven't seen him since the collision."

pening. The disappearance of Squeers in so strange a manner was a problem not easily solved.

"Has any one seen him since the collision?" asked Frank Reade, Jr.

None had. Everybody made a negative reply.

"Well, it is a very strange thing," said the young inventor, curtly. "I shall be very sorry if harm comes to Squeers. He was a pleasant fellow."

"Begorra, he was a gintleman an' a scholar," averred Barney.



The center of that group consisted of eight stout armed Mongolians, carrying the handles of a richly draped litter. No doubt some Chinese dignitary, who was traveling with his body-guard.

They were fully a score in number, and wore the fantastic dress of the Chinese outlaws. It was evident from their hostile action that they had discovered the presence of the Eclipse, and were coming to attack it.

"Do you see them, Frank?" cried Dr. Vaneyke. "I thought it best to call you and acquaint you with the situation."

"You were right," declared Frank. "Where is Sam Hop?"

Sam came quickly forward.

"Come, Hop," said Frank, shortly. "What do you make those fellows out to be down there?"

Sam scrutinized the approaching bandits a moment and made reply:

"Heap bad Chineel Killee Melican man catchee he. Stealee evytling, heap kill."

"So I thought," said Frank, tersely. "Well,

"Nor I!" cried Dr. Vaneyke, and all exchanged startled glances.

"Can anything have happened to him?"

"Go down to his state-room and see."

A search was at once instituted for Caleb Squeers. But though every corner and nook of the air-ship was searched, he was not to be found.

He had most mysteriously disappeared. What did it mean? What could have become of him?

It was a mystery as startling as it was profound. It was not likely that he had voluntarily left the air-ship. An instant suspicion of foul play was excited.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SEARCH FOR THE MISSING.

It was certainly a most unaccountable hap-

"I'se jes' sorry fo' to know dat Marse Squeers am done fo'," said Pomp, sincerely.

"We will not look at it in so serious a light as that," said Will Deane. "He may yet turn up all right. Let us hope for the best."

"You are right!" cried Frank Reade, Jr. "At least we can do nothing about it just now. The exigency which at present confronts us is not one to be ignored. Every man to his post now, and give the barbarians a good drubbing."

The defenders of the Eclipse needed no adjuration. They took their station at the loopholes in the platinum shell which covered the deck and waited for the attack.

The Chinese bandits seemed to regard the air-ship as a species of dwelling, or possibly a pagoda erected in this lonely spot by some wealthy mandarin more devote than wise perhaps.

In any event, it looked to them like lawful prey, and they were determined to despoil it. How they succeeded we shall see.

Up the mountain path they came. When within fifty yards of the Eclipse they opened fire with their long barreled rifles.

The bullets rattled harmlessly against the side of the Eclipse.

Sam Hop chuckled with glee at the result, and cried:

"Bad Chinee gettee him head in tlubble. Heap killee quick. Hop shootee, but neber gettee hurtee."

With this the pig-tailed defender of the Eclipse took aim at the foremost of the bandits. There was a sharp report, and the wretch tumbled out of his saddle.

A volley from the Eclipse made fearful havoc in the foe's midst. Frank threw a few of his patent explosive shells into their ranks. The result was fearful to witness.

The attacking party could not face so destructive a fire, and the remnant of the gang turned and fled. Down the mountain side they went helter-skelter.

Sam Hop yelled with glee as they retreated. He was overjoyed at the sweeping victory.

But Frank gazed anxiously into the valley below and said:

"We're not done with them yet. It is impossible to tell how many confederates they may have in the valley below there."

Then he went hastily back to the task of replacing the broken journal, with Barney and Pomp.

Nothing more was seen of the bandits for the time. What troubled everybody the most now was the mysterious fate of Caleb Squeers.

All sorts of theories were expounded; but none of them seemed to offer any valid explanation of the mystery.

That he was gone was certain. But how he had left the air-ship and under what circumstances it was most difficult to guess.

The hours passed, and Will Deane had suggested leaving the air-ship and engaging in a quest for the missing Squeers, when Frank Reade, Jr., with Barney and Pomp, appeared on deck.

The machinery had been repaired and the air-ship was once more ready to go on its way.

"But what shall we do about Squeers?" asked Dr. Vaneyke.

"There is only one explanation that I can accept," said Frank, decisively. "He must have fallen overboard. At what time and just where we have no means of knowing. We can go back in our course with the faint hope of finding him."

"It is the least that we can do," said Will Deane. "As much as I am alarmed about my companions at Boca Tigris, I am not willing to go ahead without first, if possible, having ascertained the fate of Caleb Squeers."

"And you are right," declared Frank Reade, Jr. "Back we will go. It may be possible that he fell on land and escaped with a few broken bones. If he fell in the water, he is no doubt food for sharks before this."

"Let us hope not," said Will Deane.

This sentiment was fervently echoed by all. Pomp went into the pilot-house and set the rotascopes in motion. The Eclipse, like a large bird, sprang into the air.

Just as they rose three hundred feet above the mountain top, Will Deane and Dr. Vaneyke caught sight of a large number of the bandits coming up the mountain side. They were evidently returning to the attack, but now that they saw the Eclipse so far above them in the

air, their superstitious fears were excited, and they were seen to, in a body, throw themselves upon their faces in terror at what seemed to them a mighty miracle.

But they were soon shut from sight, as the Eclipse went on her backward journey over the mountain top.

The air-ship kept within a reasonable distance of the earth, and those on her deck were on the watch, with powerful glasses, for some sign of Squeers, dead or alive.

But thus far he was not to be seen. Soon the gleam of the waters of the sea was visible.

At this juncture, Frank said:

"It is hardly likely that he fell into the sea. If he did, he has undoubtedly become food for the sharks."

"Perhaps not," said Dr. Vaneyke. "He may have escaped them."

"It is hardly likely," declared Frank; "unless he found some raft to cling to. However, we will go back far enough to satisfy all doubt."

Soon the Eclipse was above the tossing waters of the ocean. Suddenly, as all were scanning the sea's surface, a loud cry escaped Pomp.

"Fo' goodness sake, Marse Frank!" he cried. "Ain't 'dat a man's head down dere in de watah?"

It was not a man's head, but a drifting bit of wreckage. Pomp, however, leaning over the rail, was so excited that he did not think of the consequences.

Suddenly his foot slipped, he made a desperate effort to recover his balance, and then toppling, fell. Down he shot like a stone from a catapult.

He struck the water and was out of sight like a flash. A mighty cry of horror went up from all on board the air-ship.

"Begorra, the naygur has fallen overboard!" cried Barney. "Sure it's meself as is the dandy swimmer and I'll save him!"

The brave Irishman had thrown off his coat and would have leaped after his friend, and thus only made matters worse but for Frank Reade, Jr.

The young inventor caught Barney by the shoulders.

"Stop!" he cried. "Don't you dare to do that. If you would save your friend go to the pilot-house, turn lever number seven. Quick! Stand by all with lines. We will save Pomp yet."

Frank Reade, Jr., knew well Pomp's awful peril. He knew that the waters of the bay below were literally alive with sharks. There was but a remote chance that Pomp would escape with his life.

The air-ship went down with a sudden drop until within twenty feet of the water. There the propeller was checked, and just enough speed given the rotascopes to hold her in suspension.

Twenty feet above the water's surface those on the deck of the Eclipse saw Pomp come to the surface. At the same time in the transparent waters they could see four huge sharks rushing for their prey.

"Dive, Pomp!" shouted Frank Reade, Jr., and not a moment too soon.

Pomp was a duck in the water, and went under just in time to avoid a huge shark. When he came up a line was thrown him, and he grasped it. But at that moment a monster shark came close upon him, and there was not time to draw him away from the awful yawning jaws which were a trap of death.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MANDARIN.

It did not seem as if Pomp could be saved. The monster's jaws were close upon him. Once they caught him he would be lost.

There was not time to draw the line up. Only an instant was there in which to act.

But brief as that time was Frank Reade was ready for the exigency. His rifle was at his shoulder, and he pulled the trigger.

It was a wonderful shot. The explosive shell entered the shark's mouth. There was a concussion, and the next moment the monster lay bottom upward on the water with his immense jaws blown literally off.

A wild cheer went up from the crew of the air-ship, and they pulled upon the line. Pomp rose from the water just in time to escape the jaws of a second man-eater.

In a few moments he was once more on the air-ship's deck safe and well. It was a marvelous rescue, and now that the darky was safe his hair fairly stood on end as he thought of his narrow escape.

"Golly!" he exclaimed, with wide open eyes like saucers. "I neber fink ob dar being sich big sharks as dem in dis paht ob de worl'. No, I neber did."

"You have had a lucky escape, Pomp," declared Dr. Vaneyke. "And I am glad that shark did not get his grip on you."

"The same, Pomp," cried Will Deane, while Sam Hop nodded his head and grinned in approbation.

But Barney rushed upon his fellow voyager and embraced him.

"Begorra, Ameriky wud have lost wan av' its brouht sthars if yez had been ate up by that shark, naygur!" cried the overjoyed Hibernian.

"I'm that glad I could sthan' on me head fer a week, that I could."

Pomp was quite overcome by this effusive demonstration and it was some time before he fully recovered his equilibrium.

But Frank Reade had gone to the pilot-house and adjusting Lever No. 7 the Eclipse now mounted skyward. Up she went until at an elevation of three hundred feet.

Then the air-ship continued on her course along the coast for a distance further. But no trace of the missing Caleb Squeers was found, so it was assumed that search was useless and that he had gone to his death.

The spirits of all were much depressed by this chilling conviction. Squeers had been much liked by all, and his loss was a serious blow to the party.

Frank, however, would not wholly abandon hope.

"He may be alive yet," he declared. "At least, we will keep a close eye upon the country below as we go along the back track once more. Squeers was a shrewd fellow and may have provided for the exigency very cleverly."

The air-ship once more went on her way toward the stronghold of Wing Ho. Will Deane and Sam Hop indicated the course necessary to be pursued.

But the thrilling incidents of the day were by no means over. The air-ship was calmly forging along through space, when suddenly a sharp cry came from Will Deane, who was stationed in the bow of the craft.

"What is the matter?" asked Frank, as he joined the young American.

"Matter enough!" cried Deane. "Come here, Mr. Reade, and I will show you quite an interesting spectacle."

"Ah!" exclaimed Frank. "What may it be?"

He joined Deane, who pointed downward, saying:

"Do you see it now?"

Frank did see it, and experienced a thrill. It was a scene which was well calculated to enchain one's attention.

The country below was broken into hills and valleys. Through a rocky pass between two of these hills a party of travelers were seen making their way.

The center of that group consisted of eight stout armed Mongolians, carrying the handles of a richly draped litter. No doubt beneath the rich curtains there reclined some Chinese dignitary, who was traveling through the region with his body-guard.

This consisted of twenty armed men, all powerful fellows, with long swords and pistols. They were quite a formidable guard, but as they slowly toiled through the pass they little dreamed of the deadly peril which was so imminent.

At the head of the pass behind a rocky barrier were a hundred desperate-looking bandits, armed to the teeth. It was plain that they were lying in wait for the mandarin and his train.

Frank gazed upon the scene spell-bound for a moment. Then he exclaimed:

"It is a death trap!"

"It is nothing less," said Deane, with a shiver. "What ought to be done, Mr. Reade?"

Frank smiled grimly.

"We'll break up that hornet's nest very quickly," he declared.

It was plain that neither party had as yet seen the air-ship. The mandarin's party were plodding along with bowed heads. The robbers were intent on watching them.

Of course, by this time, all on board had also been attracted to the rail.

Frank spoke to Sam Hop.

"What do you think of that, Sam?" he asked.

"What sort of a personage is traveling in that fashion?"

Sam Hop made some grotesque gesticulations and replied:

"Him heap big mandarin. Trabble allee samee order of emperor. Pilates killee quick, Melican man no sabe."

"Just as I thought," said Frank. "Well, mandarins should know better than to travel through such a country without a strong guard."

"Him no fink of pilates," rejoined Hop. "Fink he hab body-guard allee safe—slee?"

"I slee!" exclaimed Frank, with a laugh. "Well, we will give those pirates a surprise party."

Frank had decided on a different method of defeating the foe. The idea of faking human life was exceedingly repugnant to him. Therefore, he did not use the bombs as before.

He gave Pomp orders to let the air-ship drop. Pomp obeyed the command and the Eclipse gradually settled down into the pass.

Then one of the outlaws chanced to look up and saw the air-ship for the first time. The effect was beyond description.

The fellow let out a yell of terror which was heard by those on the deck of the air-ship. The result was comical.

He turned and fled as if pursued by his Satanic majesty. The others followed, and in a jiffy were hidden behind the boulders and ledges of the hills.

It was a laughable sight and those on the deck of the Eclipse were prone to give way to great merriment.

"That is an easy victory," cried Dr. Vaneyke.

"If Ireland could only whip England as easy as that wouldn't she like it," said Will Deane, with a roguish look at Barney.

The Celt shrugged his shoulders and replied with a comical grin:

"Shure, Barney O'Shea would this minnit be sittin' on the throne av his ancisters in dear ould Ireland if Misther Frank wud let me the loan av his air-ship for a month. Shure, I'd dhrop daynamite into the House av Parlyment an' I'd make ther bluddy oppressors av me people croy fer mercy, that I wud."

Everybody laughed, but the scene below now again attracted attention.

The mandarin's body-guard had now also caught sight of the air-ship. The effect upon them was scarcely less amusing.

The Mongolian soldiers gave one yell and fled. The slaves who were at the poles of the litter dropped them and also decamped.

The litter fell with a crash, and his highness, the mandarin, was precipitated to the ground with such force that he rolled out upon the ground.

He disentangled himself from his robes with amazement and anger. But at that moment he also caught sight of the air-ship.

It was evident that he was not of the same superstitious order as his menials, for he did not betray fear but rather delight at sight of the Eclipse. At the same moment a wild cry of recognition pealed from the lips of Sam Hop.

CHAPTER XVII.

CALEB'S ADVENTURES.

CALEB SQUEERS had been standing by the lee rail of the Eclipse, when the air-ship had collided with the mountain crag that dark night.

He was leaning against the rail of the ship when the shock came. So sudden was it that he had not time to recover himself and went over the edge down into space.

Fortunately, the distance was not great, and Squeers fell lightly upon a soft bed of moss. He rolled over several times and picked himself up, a little bruised but not seriously hurt.

"Great gimcracks!" he gasped, "I'm in for it now. What a fool I was not to see that the air-ship was likely to strike this hill. I am lost!"

A deep groan escaped his lips as this realization was forced upon him. He saw the air-ship's lights go over the summit of the mountain and out of sight.

All was clear to the quick-witted fellow. He knew that it would be hours before he was missed, and then it would be difficult for those on board the air-ship to tell where to look for him.

In the meantime, on foot and without arms in the wild region, he stood a good chance of starving to death, or encountering savage wild beasts or the pirates who infested these hills.

To fall into their hands he well knew meant death.

For a moment he was overcome with the force of the reflection. It was certainly a dubious outlook.

But Caleb Squeers was not one given to despair, at least not for long. Pluck was a predominant element in his nature.

"Well," he philosophized, "here I am. I'm bound to admit that I was a cursed fool for getting here, but I've got to make the best of it. In some way or other I must find the Eclipse."

As it was altogether too dark to continue his journey, or even make it safe to prowling about

much, Caleb had decided to crawl up the mountain side as far as possible and wait for daylight.

But his troubles were not yet over. Suddenly he felt the earth give way beneath his feet, realized too late that he was upon the brow of the precipice and fell—down—down and then he received a stunning shock and all was oblivion.

When he came to, the light of day was about him and the sun was shining in his face.

Gradually he regained his strength sufficiently to rise upon his elbow and look about him. He was at the foot of a precipice and as he looked up the dizzy height he wondered how he had survived the fall.

There were bruises upon his head and body, but he soon satisfied himself that there were no bones broken. This reassured him and his courage increased.

There was a trickling rill of water near and to this he crawled.

He laved his brow with the cooling fluid, and also indulged in a refreshing draught. He was now greatly recuperated.

In fact, his strength returned so greatly that he was soon able to stand upon his feet. Then he walked to the top of the mountain again and took a view of the country about.

A more desolate region he had never set eyes upon before. Mighty-winged hawks and vultures circled high in the air above the hills and one might look far for any cheering object of green verdure.

Squeers sat down upon a stone and contemplated the scene in disgust.

"Well, I vow!" he muttered, disconsolately. "I can't say that I like this outlook at all. Now, how in the name of conscience am I ever to get out of here? Ah!"

He arose to his feet and gazed to the eastward long and searchingly.

"If I am not mistaken," he reflected, "the sea lies in that direction. Now if I reach the coast I can perhaps make my way to Boca Tigris, barring getting nabbed by the Chinese pirates. At any rate, I will be more apt to fall in with the Eclipse again. At least, I can see no other or better way. I will do it."

A tall bush near held some berries. Squeers partly satisfied his hunger with a meal upon them.

Then he filled his cob pipe with choice fine cut tobacco and set out in more cheerful spirits upon his pilgrimage to the sea.

It was by no means an easy task climbing over the hill tops and treading the devious defiles.

But he kept on bravely until afternoon, when from a high eminence he obtained the first view of the sea and knew that he had set his course right. This was a source of much satisfaction to him, and he kept on with increased courage. He was getting faint and hungry, but he reflected that if he could reach the shore he could find shellfish enough to sustain life.

As he went on now, the country began to undergo a change. The mountains gave way to a low, rolling country, densely wooded.

Suddenly Caleb came to the banks of a wide stream. Upon the opposite shore was a dense clump of poplar trees. The plucky newspaper correspondent had nearly reached the verge of the high bank overlooking the river, when a startling sight caused him to start backward and instantly slip into the cover of a thicket.

Upon the shore close to the water's edge stood a couple of Mongolians. Their rough dress and long swords proclaimed them specimens of Wing Ho's gang of pirates.

Drawn up close to the bank of the river was a four-oared sampan, or canopied boat.

Caleb gazed upon the pirates from his hiding-place with interest.

He did not doubt but that these two had companions near and that they were in the neighborhood for some villainous purpose. Just what this was he had no means of knowing, but was determined to if possible ascertain.

The two men were jabbering away in the Chinese tongue. Caleb would have given much to have been able at that moment to understand them.

For some moments they jabbered at a great rate. Then two others came down the bank, bearing a heavily-filled sack between them.

This was lifted into the sampan. Then some amount of talk followed, after which all four of the Chinese pirates went up the bank and plunged in a clump of trees.

Caleb Squeers drew a deep breath.

He could only guess what this all meant. What was in the sack he had no means of knowing.

These men were undoubtedly pirates. The sack probably contained booty. They had come up the river in the sampan to get it from some hiding-place near.

Thus Caleb philosophized, and at the same moment a daring plan entered his mind.

This was to make a dash for the boat, push off from shore, and float on down the stream to the sea. With the sampan the plucky reporter believed that he could make his way in smooth water along the coast until Boca Tigris was reached.

With Caleb impulse went far. To think was to act, and first making sure that the coast was clear, he accepted the daring chance.

From his covert he sprang, and down to the water's edge. The next moment his hands were upon the bow of the light sampan and he shoved it into the water.

Then he sprang in, and the light craft shot out into the middle of the stream.

But a mad yell came from the shore, and the four Mongolians, brandishing their swords, rushed down to the water's edge.

Two of them leaped into the water and began to swim out to overtake the sampan.

"No, you don't!" chuckled Squeers, adjusting a pair of the oars. "This is my picnic. So long, yellow birds! I'll see you in Hong Kong or New York."

Squeers easily left the swimmers astern, and he literally made the sampan fly through the water. But his victory was short-lived.

Suddenly turning a bend in the river, he chanced to look over his shoulder, and he was horrified to see the river literally filled with sampans, all coming up stream toward him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A PRINCE OF THE REALM.

SAM HOP's cry of recognition, as the mandarin gained his feet and regarded the air-ship with evident joy, was a surprise to Frank Reade, Jr., and the others.

"So, ho! Muchee good! Heapee luck!" vociferated Hop, dancing like an American Indian.

"What is the matter with you, Hop?" cried Frank, sharply. "What ails you?"

"Me feelee good. Slee! Melican man know dat Chinaman! Him no mandarin. Him Prince Kong. He heap trabbler, talkee allee samee Melican man, lib in Melican man's coun-tee allee life."

Frank Reade caught enough of this to realize that the erstwhile occupant of the litter was

not a mandarin, but a prince of the blood. Moreover, according to Hop's statement, he could talk English and his name was Prince Kong. The air-ship settled down and came to a rest upon the bed of the pass. Prince Kong remained standing in the same position, gazing eagerly at the air-ship and betraying not the least particle of fear.

What was more, he made a gesticulation of pleasure and came quickly toward the air-ship. Frank at once stepped down to meet him. Both exchanged salutations, and Frank saw that Prince Kong was a fine, intelligent-looking fellow.

"I am glad to meet you, sir," he said, in fine English. "You are welcome to my country."

"I am also glad to meet you," said Frank, taking no pains to conceal his surprise. "But how does it happen that you speak my tongue so well?"

"Ah, sir," replied Prince Kong, with a smile. "I am as familiar with American life as you. I am a graduate of Yale College, where I was sent at an early age for an American education. I have lived in America nearly all my life. It has been hardly two years since I returned to take charge of this province over which I am the ruler."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Frank, in amazement. "I am aware that many of your young men have found an education in our American universities. I am glad to meet you, for we can the more easily exchange opinions than as if you were not familiar with American life."

"Of course," replied Prince Kong. "I only wish that my people stood upon the same plane of advancement and civilization as yours."

"That may be possible some day."

"Ah, I fear that day is far distant," said Prince Kong, with a sigh. "For instance, look at the cowardly fear which made them desert their prince. If they were Americans they would stand ground and face the fiends of hades."

"No doubt they thought that some deity was swooping down upon them," said Frank, with a laugh.

"They should not think so, for all of them were in Hong Kong and heard of the exploit of your air-ship there. Ah, sir, my father, the emperor and I greatly regret that miserable occurrence. We hope to be able to render you greater hospitality before you leave our country."

"Ah, then you have heard of my air-ship before this?" said Frank.

"Assuredly, and of your wonderful inventions before I left America. I am glad to welcome you to my province and hope that you will help me to rid it of the curse which has for centuries held it in disrepute. We have sent armies against these pirates, but cannot seem to exterminate them."

"I think I can give them a good lesson before I am through," declared Frank. "But my mission here is to effect the rescue of several of my countrymen who are held prisoners by the pirates."

"I am aware of that," replied Prince Kong, "and I deplore greatly the fact that they were captured and held in such a manner. My troops and my exchequer are at your disposal in the attempt to rescue the prisoners."

"Indeed, I thank you," replied Frank. "But what will you do for the present? Your servants and body-guard seem to have gone beyond recall."

"I'll have every one of them lashed for this!" said Prince Kong, angrily. "But I am quite

safe here, I assure you. They will return when they think the danger is over."

"But it will not be safe for you to stay here alone," said Frank.

"Safe!" said the prince, producing some revolvers of the American pattern. "No wild beasts around here will attack me."

"Ah, but the pirates! But for our arrival I have no doubt they would, before this, have massacred you and your body-guard."

Prince Kong was astounded to hear from Frank an account of the death-trap into which he had been going. When informed of the superior number of the outlaws, he clasped Frank's hand, saying:

"I owe you my life, sir. I have no doubt but that I should have met death, judging from the cowardice of my guard."

At this juncture several of the recreant guard began to make an appearance, keeping at a respectful distance, however, from the air-ship. When they saw their prince, however, in conversation with Frank Reade, Jr., and that those on board the air-ship were human beings and not demons as they had feared, their courage returned.

At a sharp command from Prince Kong they now one by one returned to their posts. The litter was picked up from the ground and the crestfallen servants and guardsmen stood trembling and ashamed.

But Prince Kong did not at the moment make any attempt to censure them. He had accepted an invitation of Frank Reade to inspect the air-ship.

When the prince went on board the Eclipse he was welcomed with ceremony, every one doffing their hats, save Sam Hop, who fell on his face in a servile manner.

But the prince quickly made himself agreeable and at home aboard the Eclipse. He gladly accepted a fine Havana from Will Deane and chatted with Barney and Pomp.

Then he went below with Frank to inspect the machinery of the air-ship.

"Golly, dat am de fines' gemman I'se seen in dis yer heathen country yet!" averred Pomp. "I jes' goes yo' two fo' one, I'ish, dat he am a New York gemman in disguise, out fer a lark."

"Don't yez be givin' me any av that sthuff, naygur," retorted Barney. "Don't yez s'pose I knows a rale Chinayser? Yez can't fool Barney O'Shea, an' goin' to a Yankee college and larnin' to talk American can't make a Yankee out av a Chinayser at all, at all, an' yez kin jes' bet yer loife on it."

Then the two jokers went to the rail and frightened the wits out of the demoralized body-guard of the prince by telling them Munchausen tales, with Sam Hop as interpreter. Sam was a practical joker himself.

Meanwhile, Prince Kong was with much interest and wonderment viewing the interior mechanism of the Eclipse.

The prince was well educated in the special branches of science and machinery and knew something of electrical forces. So Frank's explanations were comprehensive to him.

"Wonderful!" he exclaimed, when the inspection was finished. "And this is all your own invention, Mr. Reade?"

"It is," replied Frank.

"Why, with a fleet of these air-ships you could whip the navies of the world."

"Without doubt."

"Then, Mr. Reade, I will commission you on behalf of the emperor to build China as many of these ships as you can at your own price."

Frank shook his head.

"What?" exclaimed the prince, in surprise.

"You refuse?"

"I do," replied Frank, bluntly. "I will tell you why, sir. The secret of this air-ship is mine. I would not sell it for money, because I have plenty of that commodity. To place my secret in the hands of others would revolutionize the world, would work an evil which—"

Frank did not finish the sentence. There was a sudden, terrific explosion, the air-ship rocked and pitched and leaped madly. All were thrown upon their faces. Something terrible had happened.

What was it?

Frank Reade, Jr., was the first to regain his feet. He knew from the motion that the air-ship was a shooting up through space. He sprang to the cabin door, gained the deck, and saw that the air about was vivid with brilliant flame.

CHAPTER XIX.

A VOLCANIC ERUPTION.

For a moment the horrifying thought came to the mind of Frank Reade, Jr., that the air-ship was on fire. Then he dispelled this, for he knew that it was wholly of metal and consequently fire-proof.

But the air-ship was shooting up through space.

Barney and Pomp and Sam Hop were prostrate on the deck. They now regained their feet as the air-ship was steady and the next moment they were above the flames.

Then Frank sprang to the rail and looked over. It was a fearful sight which met his gaze.

Far below was the earth, but just beneath the air-ship was a stupendous vomiting mass of flames, smoke, ashes, cinders and dirt; in fact, all the concomitants of a volcanic eruption.

The place where the prince's body-guard had been could not be seen. In one swift instant Frank comprehended the situation.

The spot was a portion of the extinct crater of a volcano, which had in a sudden manner and without warning broke forth again into activity.

The upward rising column of flame and smoke was fearful to witness. What had saved the air-ship from destruction? That was what for a moment mystified Frank.

Then he sprang to the door of the pilot-house. He saw that Lever No. 7 was swung wide, giving the rotascopes the full force of the current. This was singular, as nobody had been in the pilot-house at the time of the shock.

But a moment's examination at once satisfied Frank that it was the shock which had thrown the lever open before the earthquake had done, which opened the crater.

The air-ship, with that shock, feeling the force of the current, had shot into space and outstripped the flames, which would otherwise have ruined the machinery and destroyed the ives of all on board.

It was a positive miracle, as Frank was fain to admit.

As the air-ship was now beyond danger, he reversed the lever and allowed it to descend.

Down they went until within one hundred feet of the earth. They were three miles from the active crater, now on the crest of another mountain, but the heat of the eruption could be felt even at that distance, and the air was filled with flying ashes.

By this time everybody on board had recovered, Prince Kong among the rest. Mutual interchange of opinions followed and all comprehended the situation.

But what an escape for Prince Kong. Had he not been aboard the air-ship there was little doubt but that it would have been his end, for there was no doubt but that his body-guard had perished, every man of them.

The prince appreciated his narrow escape and wiped the cold perspiration from his brow.

"Once again I owe my life to you, Mr. Reade," he declared, sincerely. "How shall I ever repay you?"

"It was a lucky chance, rather," declared Frank, modestly. "Your time had not yet come, prince."

"Ah! what a fate for my soldiers. But that comes of their cowardice in deserting me. But I should have known that we were in the dangerous volcanic region of Lien Ho. Yet who would have looked for so sudden an outbreak and with such short warning?"

"You are right," agreed Frank.

"What a terrible revulsion of Nature's forces!" commented Dr. Vaneyke, who was studying the eruption with the critical eye of the scientist. "It is a magnificent spectacle."

"Begorra, I was never so near the infernal regions afore in all me loife," was Barney's comment. "Shure, av I didn't think the devil had come for me."

"He'll hab yo' yet, I'ish," said Pomp, with a grin. "Yo'll nebbet get off so lucky the next time, I jes' tell yo' ob dat."

"Bejabers, av I don't belave yez have hoodooed this party, ye black misfit!" cried Barney, making a dash at the negro. "I'll have revenge for that insult."

But Pomp ducked his head.

"Ki yi, dar! look out fo' yo'se'f, I'ish!" he cried. "Yo' am runnin' up agin a hard crowd."

Barney was taken right between the legs by Pomp's head and shoulders, and, fairly lifted in mid-air, came down sprawling on the deck.

He was upon his feet in an instant and started for Pomp, who ran below. But Sam Hop just at that moment was coming out of the galley with a pail of hot slops on his head. Barney collided with the Celestial, the two got tangled, and Sam sat down very hard. The hot slops went in a shower over both and they were fairly drenched.

Sputtering and raving, Barney crawled to his feet and began pummeling Hop. Now the Chinaman was no slouch in a rough and tumble and he retaliated. The result would have been quite serious had not Frank Reade, Jr., interfered and sent Barney away about his duties with a reprimand, while Hop went back to the galley vowing vengeance on the Celt.

This little episode had drawn the attention of all for a moment from the volcano. When they looked again it was seen with some surprise that the eruption seemed to be subsiding.

As there was nothing to keep them in the vicinity longer, Frank Reade, Jr., intimated his intention of going on.

"It will be safer for you to remain on board the Eclipse, Prince Kong," he said to that nobleman, "until a point of safety can be reached. If you will kindly tell us where you would like to be taken I will take you there."

Prince Kong bowed.

"Certainly, Mr. Reade," he replied. "And I regret exceedingly that I am compelled to delay you. I was on my way to Fort Kiang Chu, not more than fifty miles from here nearer the sea. If you can take me thither, I will not only consider it a favor but will pay you any sum asked."

"I ask no remuneration," replied Frank.

"If you will direct us in our course I will take you thither gladly."

"I will do so," replied the prince. "This Fort Kiang Chu is the first of several military outposts which I intend to establish all through this province, and from which I can send out bands of armed men to break up the nests of smugglers and pirates which infest these hills."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Frank, in surprise. "This is the first that I have known of the existence of such a place."

"It is the first post I have established," said the prince. "But I mean to establish them so thickly that the pirates will be able to find no foothold in my domains. It is war, to the death."

"Your idea is a capital one," agreed Frank. "You should succeed well. Perhaps we can co-operate with you for a time. At least until my countrymen have been rescued."

"With much pleasure," replied the prince. "I have at present five hundred men at Kiang Chu. It is a stone fort built into the sides of a hill, with a small battery above it. It is fairly well defended."

"Is there any danger of its being attacked by the pirates?"

"Yes, and that is why I am on my way thither at present. I have anticipated a battle with Wing Ho's men and desire to be present in person to direct the defense."

"Enough!" said Frank, eagerly. "We will go to Kiang Chu at once. It will be a capital base for us to work from. Pomp, adjust Lever No. 10 and let the Eclipse have full speed."

"A'right, Marse Frank," cried the dinky, as he turned the lever and the Eclipse increased her speed. Fifty miles could be easily covered by the air-ship in an hour, and so it happened that it seemed but a brief lapse of time before Prince Kong, who was on the main deck with a glass, cried:

"As sure as fate, Mr. Reade, there is the smoke of battle visible yonder. I can see Kiang Chu and there is a large party of the pirates swarming to an attack upon it."

In an instant great excitement was created.

"Put on all speed," cried Frank Reade, Jr. "Get out the electric bombs, Barney. We will take a hand in that battle if we live to get there."

CHAPTER XX.

IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY.

CALEB SQUEERS was dismayed beyond expression to see the great fleet of sampans in the river below him. All in one swift instant he saw that his clever scheme was up.

The enemy had literally surrounded him. They now suddenly appeared upon the river banks on either side, so that to go in any direction was to fall into their hands.

Squeers was a shrewd fellow and for a moment was at a loss for an expedient.

He ceased rowing and for lack of a better plan sat still in the boat. It occurred to him to try the trick of swimming, but he could see no way to dodge his captors.

The pirates above shouted to those in the sampans, and they redoubled their efforts to overtake the unfortunate American.

Caleb Squeers was far from being a coward. He drew a long breath and whistled in an unconcerned way.

"By gump, I'm in for it," he muttered. "Just like my foolishness. Why didn't I stay where I was. This is tough luck. It begins to look as if that book on Caleb Squeers' trip through Mongolia in an air-ship would never be writ-

ten. Confound their yellow hides. If I had a good Winchester I'd perforate the carcasses of a few of the heathens."

The pirates drew nearer every moment, shouting and gesticulating wildly.

But their captive made no demonstration of hostility whatever. With the utmost coolness and *sang-froid* Squeers sat down nonchalantly in the stern of the sampan.

He produced a fine cigar, lit it and blew great clouds of smoke from his lips. As the pirate boats shot up and came alongside his craft he nodded pleasantly to the villainous-looking crew, who were regarding him fiercely, and said:

"How are you, gents? Glad to see you. It ain't often I have the pleasure of meeting real gentleman. Very glad to see you."

He had no idea that his words were understood by the Chinese pirates and used them only to emphasize his amicable attitude. He bowed and scraped with much zest, but all this was lost upon the heathens.

There was nothing evidently in their natures but bloodthirstiness and they meant to take his life. Had Squeers been a coward he would have fainted at that moment.

But pluck was one of his best attributes, and he did not wince as the villains sprang aboard his sampan and advanced upon him, brandishing their keen swords.

There was no doubt but that moment would have been his last but for an intervention.

Suddenly a tall form rose in one of the sampans and a loud voice thundered a command to the would-be murderers. Then the sampan in which was the speaker came alongside and the murderous crew shrunk back.

Squeers saw that the individual to whom he owed his life was a tall, powerful framed man.

What was more, his features though yellowed by the sun's fierce rays were not of the Mongolian type.

At first this peculiarity did not strike Squeers as particularly odd. The reporter, conscious of the fact that to this person he owed his life, rose and tipped his hat ceremoniously.

"Glad to meet you, my Grand Mogul," he said, affably. "It ain't every day I have the pleasure of meeting a real live Mogul"—out came the note book. "By the way I'd like to write you up for the Associated Press. Your ugly phiz would terrify the American people into buying the paper which it contained. Eh?" as Squeers saw a black cloud gather upon the Mogul's brow. "I hope you're not offended because I borrowed your elegant row-boat for a little ride on the water. I had no idea of stealing it, be sure."

"Well, you're a dandy!" A gruff voice, in plain English, uttered these words. Poor Squeers was so astounded that he nearly tumbled overboard.

"Thunder!" he gasped. "You don't mean to say that you can speak English?"

A sardonic laugh escaped the lips of the tall leader of the pirates.

"Just as well as you, Yankee," said the pirate leader, with an oath. "Oh, I'm no Chinaman, but just as good an American as you."

"Well, that's beat me!" ejaculated the astounded Squeers. "Now I can see that you're not a Chinaman, although you dress like one. Well, doggast it, I'm glad to meet ye, although I am a little surprised to find one of my own countrymen in this forsaken part of the world."

Squeers extended his hand to grip that of the pirate leader. But the latter did not accept the courtesy and laughed scornfully.

"Oh, I'm no soft fool!" he said, harshly. "Be-

fore we go any further, I want to know your business in this locality."

Squeers was quick-witted. He had grasped the situation readily.

He knew at once that the villain before him was the renegade, Wing Ho, or Chester Wing, the escaped American convict.

He was also aware of the fact that his position was a delicate and perilous one. But he did not give way to fear.

With the utmost nonchalance he drew a cigar from his pocket and tendered it to Wing Ho.

"Smoke, friend?" he said, affably.

"Will you answer my question?" asked the pirate leader, haughtily.

"I will, with great pleasure," replied Squeers, imperturbably lighting his cigar.

"You are a cool one."

"Eh?"

"Don't you know that you are in bad hands? We are a bad gang and would just as soon lap your head off as wink."

Squeers affected surprise.

"You don't look like a cannibal," he intimated, coolly.

"I'm not afraid of you at any rate."

The pirate leader gazed at Squeers penetratingly, as if to ascertain whether he was playing a part or not. For a moment a smile played about his lips, then he said, sharply:

"Come—come! are you going to answer my question?"

"With pleasure. I am Caleb Squeers, reporter for the Associated Press, New York City. I am in this country, not for my health, as you might imagine, but to write up a book about the people and the advantages of the climate."

"And write me up as well," put in Wing Ho. "Tell the truth, and tell me that that is one of the objects of your visit here."

"As you please," agreed Squeers. "You can see what it is to be famous."

"Give me the truth now. You are one of that party of whom I have heard of coming here in an air-ship to wipe me out of existence, are you not?"

"Well," replied Squeers, satisfied that evasion would not answer, "I came here on board an air-ship; but I came as a reporter to write up the country."

Secretly, Squeers was thrilled, as the reflection came to him that it would not be difficult if his life was spared and he was held as a prisoner by the pirates, to learn the fate of Will Deane's companions.

"You are lying to me," said Wing Ho, pointedly. "You are one of that party, and I know by your appearance that you are a detective. You've come here to try and nab me and take me back to Sing Sing. But you will never do it."

"I protest!" cried Squeers, earnestly. "I am no detective."

But Wing laughed in a sardonic, blood-curdling fashion. He turned to the crew at his back and gave a few sharp commands in the Chinese language.

Then Squeers was placed between two guards in one of the sampans. The oarsmen gave way, and the concourse of boats moved forward once more.

Wing Ho retired behind the curtains of one of the sampans and did not show his face again until the end of the journey.

Poor Squeers was dejected indeed. But he kept scanning the sky, half expecting and fondly hoping that the Eclipse would appear and rescue him.

"By Jove! this is tough," he muttered, oppressed with dread anxiety. "If that confounded pirate gets the idea I am a detective, he won't rest until he has my scalp. You're out of luck, Caleb Squeers, that's certain."

With this mental conclusion Squeers tried to resign himself to fate. He guessed truly that he was being conveyed to the stronghold of the pirates, where no doubt the Daisy's crew were languishing in dread captivity.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE UNDERGROUND RIVER.

FRANK READE, JR.'s announcement that the Eclipse would participate in the battle at Kiang Chu created great excitement, and brought a joyful cry from Prince Kong's lips.

"Lively, Barney!" cried Frank. "Fetch me some of the electric bombs. Put on all speed, Pomp. There's lively work for us all."

"A'right, Marse Frank!" cried the excited dorky. "I jes' show yo' how fas' de Eclipse can go, fo' suah."

Pomp turned on the current. The air-ship's propeller literally flew and the Eclipse went ahead at railroad speed.

Dr. Vaneyke and Will Deane armed themselves with Winchesters. Sam Hop did the same.

"Hittee mark evly time. Sam Hop velly good shot. Neber miss, shootee allee same Melican man," cried the delighted Celestial, as he shoved cartridges into the rifle's magazine.

"You'll get there, Hop!" cried Will Deane, cheerily. "Let's give them a good, sound thrashing this time, old man."

"Yeppee. Hop shootee evly pilate he see," replied Sam, dancing about the deck.

"It is quite a battle, I should judge, from this distance," declared Dr. Vaneyke, as he scrutinized the distant scene. "The smoke is dense and indicates heavy firing."

"You're right," agreed Will Deane. "Well, I hope we can whip them."

"That will be easy enough," said Dr. Vaneyke. "We shall soon be there."

As they drew nearer now the details of the strife going on below could be plainly seen.

The fort of Kiang Chu was a series of palisades and breastworks not strong enough to withstand artillery, but very good defense for small arms.

No artillery was employed by either party. The pirates were sheltered by a dense wood, and a fringe of smoke and flame showed their line of battle.

The defenders of the fort suddenly caught sight of the air-ship. They ceased fighting for the moment, and their wild cheering could be heard even on the air-ship's deck.

They did not seem terrified or even astonished at sight of the air-ship. But Prince Kong explained that the report of the coming of the Eclipse had reached them some days previous from Hong Kong, so that they were really on the lookout for it.

Even the attacking pirates did not give way to the usual exhibition of superstitious fear. No doubt the news of the air-ship's coming had been circulated all through the province and the Chinese pirates were prepared for its appearance.

Nevertheless, they were plainly discomfited by the air-ship's appearance. They had stood a good chance of winning the battle and victory seemed to have declared in their favor. But the prospect of having to do battle with so formidable an adversary was not by any means encouraging.

Prince Kong was the most excited of anybody on board the Eclipse.

"We have arrived just in time," he cried, excitedly. "It is well that we have, or the fort would surely have fallen into the hands of the enemy. Point one for us, thanks to you and the air-ship, Mr. Reade."

"I think we can very soon decide the battle," said Frank, coolly, as he took his station in the bow.

They were now directly above the fort. Frank took good aim and launched one of the torpedoes down into the midst of the pirate forces.

Down went the projectile. It struck the ground, there was a terrific explosion, earth, trees and stones were scattered and fully a dozen of the foe were destroyed.

A wild shout went up from the defenders of Kiang Chu. As for the pirates they were unable to stand their ground before this fearful enemy and breaking ranks beat a disorderly retreat.

But Frank Reade, Jr., was not done with them.

"It is well to capture as many of the rascals as possible," he said to Prince Kong. "I will descend in front of the fort and let you give your orders to the soldiers therein to go forth and accept their surrender. Then we will go up about one hundred feet in the air and corral them like sheep and force them to lay down their arms."

"Capital!" cried Prince Kong, enthusiastically. "I will follow your instructions, Mr. Reade."

"Let her go down, Pomp!" cried Frank.

"A'right, Marse Frank."

Down the air-ship settled. Just in front of the fort she rested upon the earth. Then the officer in charge of the fort appeared on the palisade.

He fell upon his face humbly before his prince and the great inventor, Frank Reade, Jr., crying in Chinese:

"Oh, great master, your servant appeals to you! I am your faithful slave, oh, great and mighty prince!"

"Arise, Ling Ko," said Prince Kong, impatiently. "Mind you these orders. Take half of your men, go forth and make prisoners of the foe as rapidly as we drive them to surrender. Do you understand?"

"I understand you, great prince," declared Ling Ko, with a low bow. "Your commands will be obeyed."

"You will remain aboard with us, Prince Kong?" asked Frank Reade, Jr.

"With your permission," replied the prince.

"Certainly. Turn Lever No. 7, Pomp. Go up about one hundred feet."

Pomp did as directed. Up went the air-ship until one hundred feet above the earth.

Then the air-ship went ahead. A good view of the country below could be had, and to Frank Reade's surprise, he saw that the pirates had joined their forces and seemed to be making an effort to reach one common destination.

A moment later and he saw what this was. Not two miles from the fort was a broad, swift-flowing river. Upon the bosom of this river was a large number of small boats or Chinese sampans.

For miles to the north the river could be seen as flowing through a wild tract of country. But at this juncture it mysteriously disappeared.

With the aid of his glass Frank saw the explanation of this. A mighty black-mouthed

cavern yawned in the side of a hill, and into this the river flowed and was swallowed up from sight.

The pirates were making post-haste for the boats. Several of these had already become loaded, and were making for the cavern. Two disappeared within its mouth.

It did not require a moment for all on board to comprehend the situation.

"This cavern and underground river was no doubt the means of entrance from inland to the stronghold of Wing Ho.

"Hurrah!" cried Dr. Vaneyke. "I tell you, Frank, we have tracked the foe to their lair."

"I believe you're right," agreed the famous inventor, then turning to Will Deane he asked:

"Will, do you remember this place?"

Deane shook his head, but replied:

"I have never been here before. Yet I do not doubt but that it leads into the pirates' lair, for the same river must be the one that comes into the bay where Wing Ho's fleet is anchored. It is only another very clever means of entrance, I should say."

This seemed an explanation of the mystery. But Frank Reade, Jr., went to the rail and called to Sam Hop to order the pirates to surrender or they would be shot down.

"Yeppee. Me tellee allee sameel!" cried Hop. He shouted the summons to the terrified boatmen. Meanwhile, Frank dropped a bomb into the river to emphasize matters. A great column of water shot upward and several of the sampans were overturned.

But the fleeing pirates did not heed the summons. Frank was about to give an order to Pomp, when a tragic thing happened.

Suddenly, the famous inventor's companions were horrified to see him suddenly reel, while a red spot on his head showed that he had been struck by a bullet. Frank Reade, Jr., turned ghastly pale, and before anybody could reach him, fell backward, and in a twinkling went over the air-ship's rail and into the water of the river below.

CHAPTER XXII.

ON BOARD A PIRATE JUNK.

CALEB SQUEERS was permitted to indulge in reflections which were by no means of the most cheerful sort.

The shrewd reporter was in a position just now which was dubious in all its aspects.

He could regard Wing Ho as only a merciless, unscrupulous villain, to appeal to whom for mercy would have been the height of folly.

Squeers had not as yet committed this breach of good sense. But he was well aware of one fact, and that was, that he must in some manner devise a plan of escape, else he would suffer certain death.

"By Jupiter! I am not ready to die yet," he muttered, decidedly. "Let's see if I can't shake up some sort of a plan to get out of this scrape with a whole skin."

With that he fell to narrowly scanning the ruffians near him. In form they were powerful brutes; in features they were of the lowest order of intelligence.

This did not seem to result in the most satisfactory sort of conclusion. To attempt to worst them single-handed was a trick hardly to be attempted successfully.

They carried tremendous long swords, with which at a blow they could have quartered him.

To be sure he had the use of his limbs, for he had not been bound. But there seemed no good opportunity of making use of them just at present—at least not safely.

But Squeers was not to be defeated. His accomplishments were many and varied and he was not slow to employ them to some advantage.

Wing Ho had retired to the depths of his sampan and had drawn the curtains close.

It was just at a bend in the river, and the sampans at the moment were near a shallow bar which led to a steep bank beyond which was a thick forest.

Squeers had learned several Chinese expressions and phrases from Sam Hop. He was a natural mimic and an accomplished ventriloquist.

Suddenly Wing Ho's stern voice seemed to come from behind the curtains of his sampan.

"Wun Sing, go ashore!"

This was the name Squeers had heard the pilot chief give the tall, powerful-framed Mongolian who sat by the reporter's side. The command was plainly heard by the others and it gave them a start of surprise.

But it was certainly Wing Ho's voice, and to disobey his command was death. Therefore, the men in Squeers' sampan ceased rowing and turned the sampan in to the shore. The oarsmen in the other boats all ceased rowing.

Again, with unmistakable Chinese accent and language, came Wing Ho's voice again:

"Leave the American there! Row on!"

The order was sharp, short and imperative. But it was not to be disregarded, even though the Mongolian pirates looked their plain amazement.

"Do you mean that, great captain?" asked Wun Sing, in a low tone of voice.

"Off comes your heads! Obey!"

This was the limit of Squeers' knowledge of the Chinese tongue. But it was sufficient. In a moment he was lifted bodily out of the sampan and placed on shore.

Then the powerful oarsmen were about to regain their places in the sampan when Wing Ho raised the curtain of his sampan and looked out to see what was the matter. Had he been asleep at that moment, as the plucky reporter had hoped, he would surely have gained his liberty.

As Wing Ho took in the situation with the most intense amazement and wrath, he sprang up and yelled fiercely in Chinese:

"What are you doing, you senseless louts? Don't let the dog escape. After him for your lives! What treachery is this?"

"But you told us to put him ashore, great captain," declared Wun Sing in Chinese.

"I told you to put him ashore?" thundered the pirate leader. "What do you mean? Don't ye tell me such a lie as that."

Wun Sing humbly prostrated himself on the sand-bar and intimated that it was some foul fiend who had whispered in his ear. But Wing Ho was furious.

"This will cost you your head, you lying dog!" he thundered. "I'll teach you to lie to me."

Squeers had made a break for liberty. He reached the steep bank and began to climb it. But the treacherous sands gave way and he was precipitated to the water's edge.

Stout hands seized him and he was thrust again into the sampan, where he was held by two of the pirates. Wing Ho berated them all soundly, then the procession went on once more.

Squeers' daring attempt had proved a failure. Yet his subterfuge had not been discovered, and it was still a mystery to the pirates where the mysterious voice had come from.

A less plucky fellow than Caleb Squeers

would now have lost courage. But the shrewd reporter was not of that stamp.

After this little diversion the sampans continued on their way without further interruption.

Very soon the river widened and diverged into the many channels of an extensive delta with the blue sea beyond.

Passing through the delta a large junk of the Chinese type was seen anchored not a mile out to sea. Toward this the fleet of sampans now went.

In due time they came alongside the junk,

hoisted, and the junk went on its way, leaving the fleet of sampans behind. Judging from the position of the sun, Squeers reckoned that they were following the coast.

For an hour the junk lumbered along under a fair breeze. Then a sudden excitement sprung up on deck.

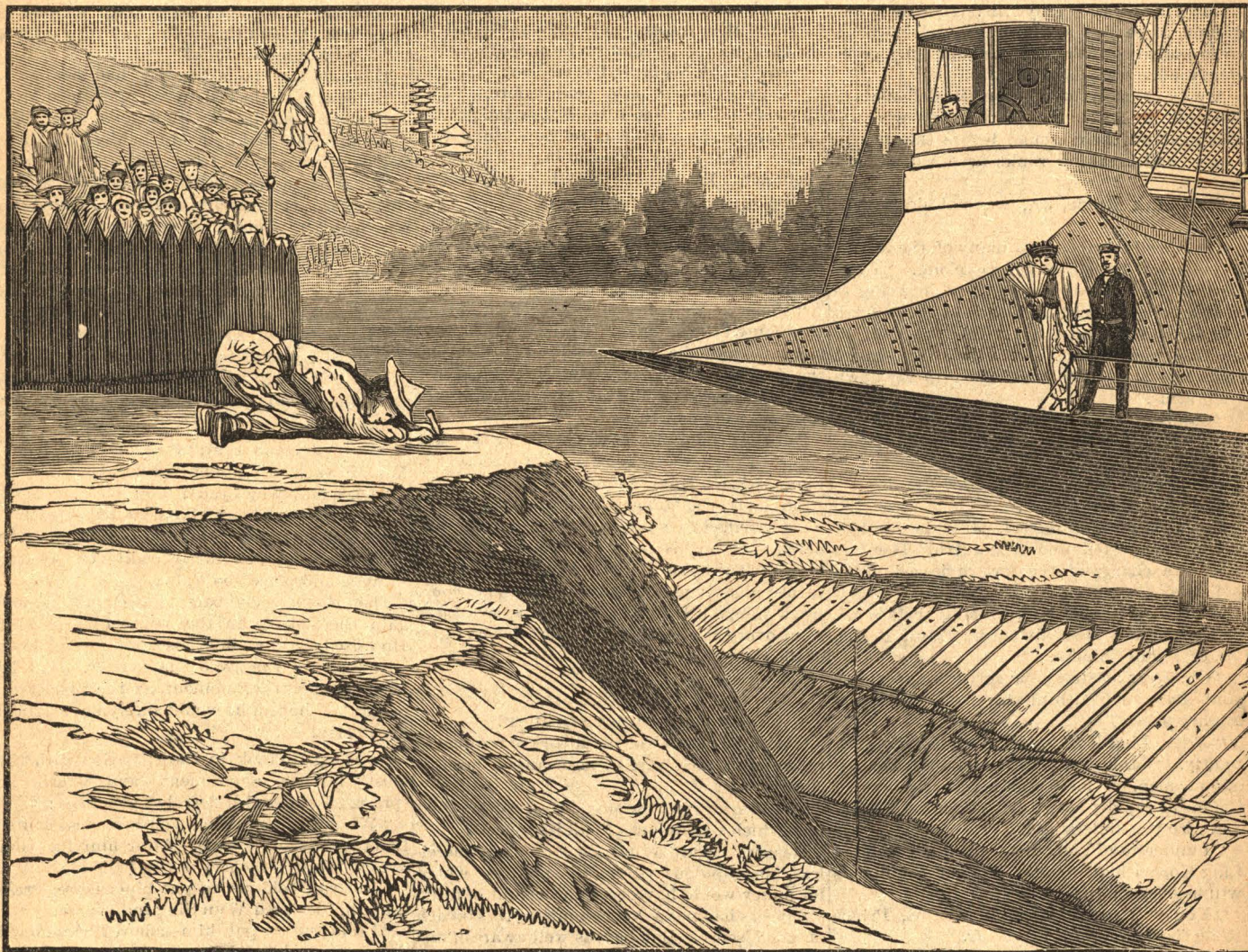
A hail came from the main-top and the junk's course was changed. Wing Ho came rushing upon deck, a small drum beat and the armed men of the crew rushed to quarters.

Squeers guessed that a sail had been sighted and experienced a peculiar thrill. Without

her, being more rakish. There seemed not a weapon of defense aboard the ship. She did not carry a single cannon.

The pirates were yelling like fiends. Her guns were trained upon the merchantman and the next moment the roar of cannonade burst upon the air.

Great, gaping holes were torn in the bulwarks of the merchantman. Yet her defenseless crew tried to outrun the foe. But this was impossible. The junk glided rapidly alongside, and men with grappling-irons swarmed at the rail.



The officer in charge of the fort appeared on the palisade. He fell upon his face humbly before his prince and the great inventor, Frank Reade, Jr., crying in Chinese: "Oh, great master, your servant appeals to you! I am your faithful slave, oh, great and mighty prince!"

A score of villainous-looking pirates were on board.

Wing Ho sprang aboard the junk and gave sharp, imperative orders. Part of the crew of the sampans went aboard the junk also with Squeers.

It was the first time in his life that the reporter had ever set foot aboard a Chinese vessel. If this was a representative type, he was prone to admit that they were very dirty and vile craft.

He gazed about him not without some interest at the unique appointments of the junk. Then a guard took him into the cabin in the high pitched stern of the vessel. Here he was left in a position from whence he could look out through a window and observe what was going on, on deck.

The lateen sails of the pirate vessel were

doubt, the pirate had discovered a new victim.

It was not long before Squeers became satisfied that the pursued was being rapidly overhauled.

A shot from the Long Tom forward had the effect of bringing cheers from the lips of the motley crew. Then the junk came about for a broadside, and Squeers got a view of the victim not a quarter of a mile distant.

A handsome clipper ship she was, with all courses set. The foretopmast had gone by the board—the effect, no doubt, of the shot from the Long Tom.

Squeers felt his blood boil as he saw what a neat, trim craft the ship was. She carried the flag of Italy and her crew seemed to be making every endeavor to escape her dreaded opponent.

But in vain. The junk could easily outsail

Squeers was in a terrible state of mind.

"My God!" he gasped. "This is terrible! Oh, if Frank Reade, Jr., was only here now with the Eclipse!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

A FUTILE SEARCH.

A GREAT cry of horror went up from the lips of those on board the air-ship as Frank Reade, Jr., with a bullet wound on his head, went over the rail and down full one hundred feet into the river's current.

"Och hone, Misther Frank is killed!" cried Barney, frantically, rushing to the rail. "It's the lasht ov Misther Frank, bad cess to the omadhoun what kilt him."

"Fo' de good Lor' sakes!" cried Pomp, wildly, "don' yo' say dat yit, I'ish. Marse Frank kain't be killed."

"My God!" gasped Dr. Vaneyke. "I fear he is gone."

All were at the rail in time to see Frank strike the water. He was not seen again.

He struck very near the mouth of the cavern, and if he came up it was undoubtedly in its depths where the swift current had carried him.

All the Chinese pirates in their sampans were now being swept out of sight into the cavern.

Those on board the air-ship dared not throw any bombs for fear that Frank might be with-

sampans and their occupants had gone beyond the bend and were out of sight, of course.

In vain those on board the air-ship tried to devise some means of learning the actual fate of Frank Reade, Jr. It would seem as if he had been at once carried under by the swift current and was lost.

The spirits of all were depressed by this overwhelming conviction. Barney could not restrain his emotions.

"Shure, it's kilt he is, the brave gossoon!" he wailed. "Faith, an' it's a shame, for there's divil another in ther worruld loike Frank

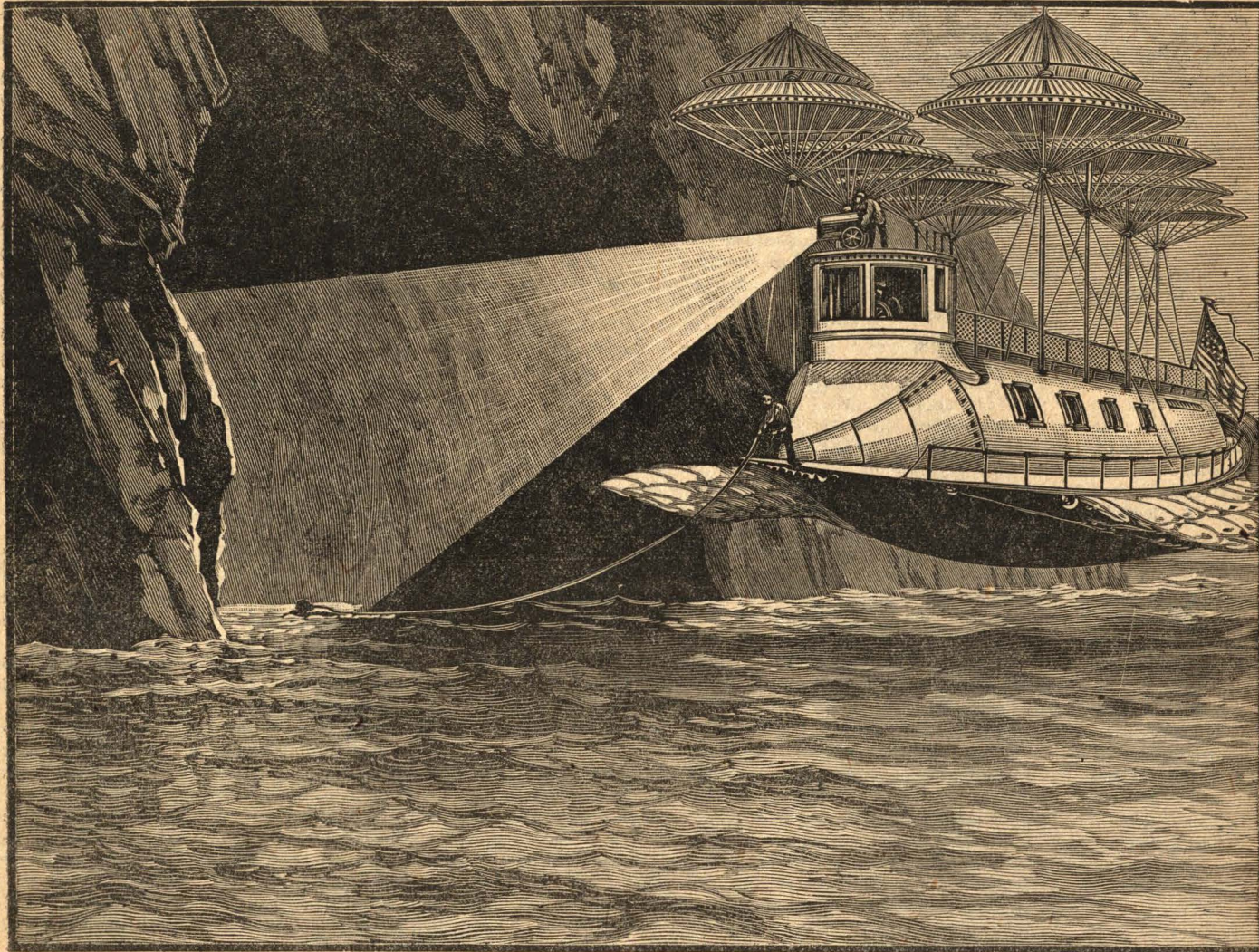
the current, but to swim back was another matter.

However, Pomp was very determined, and a plan was finally agreed upon, which it was reckoned would be safe.

A long line was procured and tied to Pomp under his shoulders.

Then he was lowered into the water, and with Barney paying out the line he drifted down with the current.

The darky was at home in the water—indeed, almost as much as upon land. He struck out and swiftly swam down the current.



A long line was procured and tied to Pomp under his shoulders. Then he was lowered into the water, and with Barney paying out the line he drifted down with the current. The darky struck out and swiftly swam down the current. The search-light made things in the cavern as light as day.

in its reach and be injured. In the terrible excitement and anguish of the moment nothing was done to restrain the pirates and all of them were enabled to escape into the cavern.

Then it occurred to Pomp to sink the air-ship to the level of the river and make an effort to explore the cavern. This was done and the air-ship was suspended not ten feet above the surface of the river.

The search-light was then thrown into the darkest depths of the place; but two hundred yards ahead the cavern took a turn abruptly to the right.

What was beyond this turn it could not reveal. The walls of the cavern, as far as seen, were smooth and incapable of affording a foothold.

Neither was any living being in sight. The

Reade, Jr. Worra, worra! it's broken me heart is intoirely!"

"Don't give up hope," said Will Deane, cheerily. "He may have been carried along with the current, and may succeed in keeping up and come out all right yet."

"Golly! I done fink de bestest fng dis chile kin do am to swim down dat ribber and see if Marse Frank am dere. Mebbe he am hangin' onto some rock or odder an' I kin jest bring him back."

"No," said Dr. Vaneyke, positively. "That would be folly. You could never swim back against that current and the result would only be that you would be lost too."

There was no boat aboard the air-ship and no method at present practicable of swimming into the cavern.

It would have been easy enough to go down

There was fully a quarter of a mile of the line. The search-light made things in the cavern as light as day.

Pomp was seen to reach the bend in the cavern, where he disappeared from view.

Barney kept paying the line out until the end was reached. Then, of course, it was in order to draw in.

A series of signals, made by pulling upon the line, had been agreed upon, and now Pomp signaled to be drawn in.

At once all gave way at the line and Pomp was drawn in. It was some while before the darky was brought back to the air-ship's deck.

He clambered over the rail and shook the water from him like a wet duck.

"Well," said Dr. Vaneyke, impatiently, while the others looked expectant, "what did you see, Pomp?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THREE HUNDRED MILES AWAY.

"Golly, Marse Vaneyke," cried the negro, excitedly, "I couldn't see nuffin'. It was jes' as dark as a pocket, an' de watah jes' roared like thunder, an' I couldn' hear my own ears."

Dr. Vaneyke groaned bitterly.

"Alas!" he said, dismally. "I fear Frank's fate is sealed."

"There is just one other plan I would propose," said Will Deane.

"What is that?"

"There is a possibility that this river emerges into the open air again somewhere and that Frank may have swam through."

Dr. Vaneyke grasped at the idea.

"Of course," he cried, excitedly. "Why didn't we think of that before? At least, nothing is to be gained by staying here."

"Certainly not," replied young Deane. "If Mr. Reade was drowned, we will never recover his body here. To attempt the passage of the underground river would not be easy and might result in nothing after all."

"You are right," cried Dr. Vaneyke. "We will endeavor to follow the river by the trend of the country. It is our only hope to find where it comes out."

Pomp sprang into the pilot-house and pressed the electric lever. The air-ship immediately began to rise.

Once above the eminence, a course was set in the direction in which it was believed that the river ran.

All this while Prince Kong had ventured to say nothing. He had paced the deck in a disconsolate manner, and none seemed to feel worse than he over the unknown fate of Frank Reade, Jr.

He now approached Dr. Vaneyke, and said:

"A noble and wonderful man has gone to his death. I shall consecrate my life to the extermination of these pirates and avenging him."

"As long as the Eclipse can float we will pursue the scoundrels!" cried Dr. Vaneyke, spontaneously.

"I am glad to join you, sir," said Prince Kong, with feeling. "But with all the armies of China, it does seem strange that these wretches are able to set us at defiance."

"Indeed, they have the advantage of having a stronghold in an inaccessible country," replied the scientist. "But—I suppose you ought to return to Kiang Chu?"

"No, it is not wholly necessary," replied the prince. "At least, not now. My troops there are victorious and they will be safe for some time to come."

"We are very glad of your co-operation," said Dr. Vaneyke. "Oh, I can only pray that through some miracle Frank's life was spared."

"I can say amen to that," declared Prince Kong.

The air-ship was sailing along now at a good rate, and but a few hundred feet above the earth.

A good watch was kept of the country below in the hopes that the subterranean river would reappear.

Thus things were when Sam Hop suddenly rushed upon deck in the wildest of alarm. He began to dance a can-can, shouting unintelligibly all the while.

"What's the matter with you?" cried Will Deane, catching him by the shoulders.

"Heap smashee air-ship, killee allee on board, thunder, lightning, come quickee, smashee, killee, Sam Hop 'fraid."

The words had barely left the Celestial's lips when Prince Kong gave expression to a wild cry of alarm. What did it mean? Was Sam Hop's fear contagious?

The others were astounded at this conduct upon the part of Prince Kong and Sam Hop.

But an explanation quickly came.

"What's the matter with you?" cried Will Deane, shaking Hop unmercifully.

"My God! we are lost," cried Prince Kong, madly. "The typhoon! It is upon us. See!"

The last words were wailing in accent. Everybody looked now to the distant horizon seaward, and a terrible sight was accorded them.

Seeming to spring from the horizon line and mounting with terrific speed zenithward was a dull, yellow haze. The sun was instantly obscured, and a fearful, ghastly hush fell upon all nature.

Only those who have witnessed the dread typhoon of the China Sea can realize what a terrific storm it is.

Its oncoming would hardly give a sailor time to furl sail, and woe to the luckless ship overtaken by the deadly typhoon unless well off the coast. Even then only the most stanch of ships are able to outride it.

Fortunately these storms are rare in any part of the world. But come they will, sooner or later.

A ship might sail the China Sea for years without getting in the typhoon's path, but once struck by the dread destroyer the chance of escape would be small.

Often these terrible storms are known to extend far inland and wreck whole towns. In certain respects the typhoon is like our Western cyclones, but ten times more furious and deadly.

Therefore it was small wonder that poor Sam Hop should have come near having a fit when he saw the dread storm coming.

Prince Kong was cooler, but even he was pallid as a corpse.

The oncoming of the typhoon was so rapid that it would have been impossible to reach the earth in time to avoid it. Even then it would be almost certain to wreck the air-ship.

"My God!" gasped Dr. Vaneyke, "we are lost!"

The scientist was well familiar with the peculiarity of the typhoon, although he had never experienced or witnessed such. He knew well what it meant.

"Quick, Barney, close the hatch! Below everybody. For your lives!"

Pomp had sprung into the pilot-house and Dr. Vaneyke followed him. They had just time to shut and bar the iron door when the storm struck the air-ship.

What followed in the next few moments none on board could say. All were precipitated upon their faces, and were jolted, hurled and tossed about like puppets. It seemed as if the air-ship was turning over and over like a cylinder.

Nothing could be seen and the air was full of horrid noises. It seemed as if they were certainly going to their doom.

It seemed an age that this continued. Every moment the shock of contact with the earth was feared, and there was not one person on board who expected to escape alive from the terrible wind storm.

Then suddenly the fearful motion ceased. The air-ship rode level and true once more.

Dr. Vaneyke, bruised and half-fainting, arose to his feet. He staggered to his feet and managed to see through the pilot-house window.

They were at the moment far up in the air.

The sun was shining brightly, and the atmosphere was clear and frosty.

The scientist glanced downward and in a moment understood all. The scene below was a chaotic one. The air was filled with flying debris, spray and dust all commingled.

Pomp had had presence of mind enough to turn the lever on the key-board, which sent the full force of the electric current into the rotascopes. This had caused the air-ship to shoot upward with great velocity, and though it had received fearful rough handling by the gale, it had proved stanch and had actually risen above the storm cloud.

The air-ship was really at a frightful distance from the earth's surface. Indeed, so rarefied was the air that one could hardly breathe.

"Heaven be praised!" gasped Dr. Vaneyke. "We are safe. We have safely weathered the storm."

"Golly fo' glory!" spluttered Pomp, as he gained his feet. "I jes' nebbber wants no mo' ob dat sort ob 'sperience. I done finck dis yer coon was a gone goose dat time, fo' suah."

Barney and Prince Kong came out of the cabin and Will Deane and Sam Hop soon followed. All were bruised but nobody was badly hurt. They at once commenced to exchange congratulations.

The air-ship was little damaged. One of the rotascope shafts was slightly bent, and the deck was covered with sand and stones and broken bits of wood.

"Begorra, it's a foine job fer yez, naygur, to clane up the deck," cried Barney. "I'll lind yez a hand av' yez—"

The Celt ceased speaking. He turned ghostly pale, foam flecks appeared upon his lips not unmingled with blood.

"Bejabers—I can—hardly breathe!" he gasped. "It's choking I am."

Sam Hop was at the same moment attacked in the same manner. The others began to feel the trouble coming.

All might have been overcome in a brief space had not Dr. Vaneyke understood the cause of the trouble.

The passage of the typhoon had created almost a vacuum in the upper stratum of atmosphere. Human beings would speedily have become suffocated for lack of oxygen.

Dr. Vaneyke, who was a scientist, understood the trouble at once. Fortunately he was not so greatly overcome but that he could reach the pilot-house.

The current had not been turned off and the air-ship had been mounting upward all the while.

In a very short time the Eclipse would have been far above the life-giving element in the atmosphere, and the inmates of the ship would have become like solid blocks of ice.

But the doctor reached the lever and turned the current off. The air-ship began to descend.

He was none too soon, for he could hardly draw breath and sank gasping upon the deck. In a few moments, however, they had descended below the danger and recovered.

The typhoon had passed. It was now safe enough to descend, but nothing could be seen of the earth for the white, fleecy masses of clouds far below.

But the Eclipse settled rapidly below these. Soon through a dim haze the earth was seen.

They had reached a frightful altitude. All shivered now as they thought of it.

But rapidly the Eclipse settled down until within a thousand feet of the earth. They

were now above the waters of a mighty inland sea, to the northward of which was a mighty mountain.

Directly at the base of this mountain there was a village of no small size, and beyond a mighty wall many feet high and fully fifty feet thick at this juncture, extended across the country as far as the eye could reach.

Exclamations of astonishment escaped the lips of Prince Kong and Dr. Vaneyke.

"Is not that the great wall of China?" asked the professor.

"It is," replied the prince, "and this is the bottomless sea of Waddu. How did we ever reach this place? Yonder is the sacred mountain where the finest crystal in China is found."

"Waddu!" gasped Dr. Vaneyke. "Why, who would believe it? We have been blown three hundred miles out of our way. We must have traveled with frightful velocity."

It was a matter of great wonderment. However, the fact remained, and also that darkness was fast coming on.

There was nothing for it but to set a return course; but at this moment Barney came up from the hold, excitedly crying:

"Bejabbers, av we ain't careful we'll be in the bottom of the say right quick! Divil a bit of wather is there in the storage jars. The sthorm sphilled it all out."

Great dismay was created by this announcement.

CHAPTER XXV.

A THRILLING VOYAGE.

WHEN Frank Reade, Jr., went over the rail of the air-ship with the bullet mark upon his head he was unconscious. But the moment the cold water of the river closed over him he recovered consciousness.

The shock brought him to and with a natural instinct he struck out to swim.

Now Frank Reade, Jr., was a good swimmer, which was a fortunate for him. Otherwise, his life would have paid the penalty of that fall into the river.

Frank had not realized what had hit him, and it was so dark in the cavern that he could not have seen the blood streaming from the wound.

Fortunately, however, it had only been a slight concussion, the ball tearing up the scalp for a short way, and the shock had given him a temporary faintness. But it was not a wound which would in any way be likely to prove fatal.

The current of the river was extremely powerful and he was swept along with great force.

He quickly found that he was unable to stem it. With chilling force the reflection came to him that he was being swept underground, and to where he could only guess. Would he ever see daylight again?

But hope revived, when he remembered that the sampans of the pirates had entered the cavern. Without doubt it lead into the underground stronghold of the pirates, of which he had heard so much.

He knew not in the moment whether to feel dismay over this fact or to rejoice in the likelihood of gaining an entrance to Wing Ho's den.

Thus a thousand varied reflections flashed through Frank's brain as he was swept on by the current.

It was not much work to keep afloat, for swift water is ever buoyant. He gave up attempting to stem the current and suffered himself to be carried on at a rapid rate.

On and on he was whirled through a winding

passage, when suddenly he heard guttural voices near him.

The next moment the light of a torch lit up the water. It revealed to Frank Reade, Jr., a startling scene.

Not a dozen yards from him and also being swept along by the current was a sampan with four occupants.

These were, of course, a portion of the routed party from Fort Kiang Chu. The young inventor realized his danger if discovered and tried to get beyond the range of the circle of light.

But before he could succeed in doing this, a sharp exclamation from the occupants of the sampan was evidence that he was seen. The next moment he saw the craft come swooping down upon him.

Frank Reade, Jr., knew that if the occupants of that sampan once got their grip on him his fate was sealed.

He compressed his lips with grim determination. A plan of action was already outlined in his mind.

Down came the sampan. Two of the Chinese pirates were in the bow ready to grasp him.

But just at that moment Frank dove. He came up just astern of the craft. With a quick movement, seizing hold of the stern, he tipped the light craft over.

It was a daring trick and cleverly done. The wretches were now in the water as well as himself. With angry yells a party of them clung in the darkness to the overturned sampan.

But Frank was not yet out of trouble. He had just begun to congratulate himself upon the success of his daring move when a startling thing occurred.

He suddenly felt himself in the embrace of a powerful foe. One of the pirates, a giant in strength, had come up close beside him and had clutched Frank wholly by chance. Yet it was a firm clutch just the same.

The desperate wretch knew from the feeling that it was not one of his lightly clad countrymen. He realized that he had a grip upon a foe and a yell escaped his lips.

The next moment Frank Reade, Jr., was engaged in a most terrific struggle with a deadly foe. Pen cannot depict adequately the horror and force of that struggle.

It was a struggle for life. The famous inventor was not as strong as his opponent, but he had the advantage of skill and science and was really the better swimmer of the two.

Now they went down under the water, down—down until the current seemed likely to suffocate them.

Then relaxing their grip for the moment both contestants would as by mutual consent come to the surface for air.

One moment Frank had his foe's head under the water, the next moment it was *vice versa*. It very soon began to look like a question of simple endurance.

In this respect Frank had the decided advantage. He was light and buoyant and could handle himself better. His antagonist puffed and panted with exertion and did not seem able to long endure such violent exercise.

Realizing this, Frank conducted himself accordingly. Neither had a weapon and were obliged to rely simply upon muscular strength. But the struggle could not last forever.

It came to a sudden end, and in a tragic manner.

The current all this while had been rapidly carrying them down stream. In places the passage was narrow, and narrow shelves of jagged rock frequently projected out over the water.

Entering a swirling eddy the two combatants were whirled about several times and came in violent collision with one of these projecting spurs of rock.

The result was that the pirate foe received a stunning blow on the head. That it deprived him of consciousness Frank felt sure, for he felt the fellow's hand relax and knew that the battle was won.

It would have been an easy matter for Frank Reade, Jr., then and there to have submerged his foe's head and drowned him. But the young inventor had not the heart to do this.

There was no doubt but that the wretch would drown anyway, so Frank was content to strike out for himself and he saw no more of his erstwhile foe. But the struggle had weakened Frank not a little and he realized that he could not for a much greater length of time keep afloat in the swift current.

He began to wonder how far he had been carried in the current and whether there would ever be an end to the underground passage. But his question was soon answered.

Suddenly he was swept about an angle and over a slight series of rapids. The gloom was displaced by a dim light, and he was enabled to see that he was floating in a vast basin of still water, which was overarched by a mighty high roofed cavern.

The basin occupied only a small part of the enormous underground chamber, however, and he saw that the shore was not many feet distant and struck out for it.

Soon he felt solid ground once more under his feet and with a feeling of inexpressible relief Frank crept up on the sands and sank down exhausted.

He now realized how extremely weak he was. Certainly he could not have kept afloat much longer in that madly whirling current.

After a few moments' rest to recuperate himself, Frank staggered to his feet. He was, of course, drenched, and his first thought was of drying his clothes, as far as he was able.

He removed them, and wrung the water out of them as well as he could. While thus engaged he kept behind a large shelf of rock, for quite a number of the pirates in the sampans passed on down the stream.

Having dried his clothing as well as possible, the young inventor now began to cast about him for a way out of the cavern. He must, in some manner, contrive to rejoin his friends aboard the Eclipse. But this did not seem easy.

Frank had no doubt but that this mighty arched cavern was a part of Wing Ho's stronghold, as described by Will Deane.

In that event it behooved him to move with great care. But no sooner had he reached this decision than a fresh calamity overtook him.

He heard guttural exclamations behind him, and turned just in time to be seized by the muscular arms of half a dozen of the Chinese pirates, and was quickly flung upon his back.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FATE OF THE ITALIAN SHIP.

BUT Caleb Squeers hoped in vain for the appearance of Frank Reade, Jr., and his air-ship. At that moment the famous young inventor and champion of the weak and defenseless was far away.

Had he been present, Wing Ho's junk, with its murderous crew, would soon have been a thing of the past.

The Italian ship was now in a bad state. She could make practically no resistance of

avail to the enemy. Yet her crew were at the rail, resolved to fight to the death.

It was, after all, their wisest course, for Wing Ho never spared the crews of any of his prizes. Death to all was his watchword.

Caleb Squeers was beside himself with horror and dismay at his inability to help the crew of the clipper ship.

The junk now closed with the ship. Their yards locked, grappling irons were thrown out, and the murderous crew at the rail met the valiant defenders of the ship.

The brave reporter watched the horrid carnage with a dread fascination. He longed to break out of his prison-room and become one of the combatants, but this was impossible.

Wing Ho himself, with sword in hand, led the boarding party. They swarmed upon the rail of the Italian ship like bees.

At the first attack, however, valiant work upon the part of the defending crew beat them back. The battle was even carried to the rail of the junk.

A wild cheer of triumph went up from the throats of the brave crew of the ship.

They were, but a handful, yet they fought with a mighty desperation and actually held their own against five times their number.

"God be with them!" groaned Caleb Squeers, as he watched the unequal contest. "Oh, if there were only a few more of them!"

But Wing Ho, with mad yells and curses, urged his demons on. Again and again they were beaten back.

But weight of numbers began to tell. Wounds and loss of number made the defending party weaker.

They fought desperately, silently now. The end was drawing near.

"Oh, for help! Oh, for relief!" cried Squeers, in agony of distress. "Oh, for the appearance of some war ship now!"

But alas! help was not at hand. Doom was close upon the devoted crew. Every moment they grew weaker.

Now they were beaten back from the rail of their ship; back to the mainmast. Still the horrid strife went on.

"Down with every man of them!" yelled Wing Ho, fiendishly. "Give no quarter!"

His devilish orders were obeyed to the letter. No quarter was given. At last but one man of the ship's crew was left.

He was a tall, powerful seaman. With cutlass in hand and bared arms he faced the fiendish horde that swarmed like demons about him.

It was a sad and thrilling spectacle. His was a hopeless cause.

Death was his certain portion. He could not ask for quarter. It would not be given. As well die fighting to the last.

And a mighty struggle the brave fellow made. He laid about him so lustily that the foe lay in heaps about him. But his good right arm had begun to lose its strength.

Human endurance could not longer bear up under that strain.

He had made a valiant struggle for life. Caleb Squeers could see the expression of despair upon his face.

The pirates now like wolves swarmed about him. In vain he endeavored to beat them back.

Now he was down upon his knees. A moment later and all was over. Victory had sided perforce with Wing Ho and his horrid crew.

Looting the ship was now in order. The pirates were given permission to seize upon what might suit their fancy.

As a result merchandise, wares of all sorts,

the entire cargo of the ship was hauled over and much of it taken aboard the junk.

Squeers watched the scene, sick at heart.

"By Jupiter! this sort of thing wouldn't be tolerated for long on Uncle Sam's coast," he muttered. "I only wish our country could send a few ships here. There'd be an end to this sort of thing. Oh, if Frank Reade, Jr., and the Eclipse would only turn up now."

Some hours were consumed in the looting of the ship.

Then Wing Ho suddenly appeared on deck. Sharp orders were given and the junk quickly cast off from the ship.

The junk's sails filled before the breeze and she stood away until about three hundred yards distant. Then she squared yards and came about for a broadside.

The word was given to fire, and solid shot were poured into the hull of the doomed ship with her dead crew. These were aimed as near the water-line as possible, and soon great, gaping holes showed in her hull, through which the water poured in great volume.

Slowly the ship began to settle in the water. Nearer and nearer her rail drew to the surface of the sea.

She was sinking fast.

The pirates had ceased firing into her. Down she settled until suddenly with a magnificent lurch she dipped her nose in the deep and went down bow foremost.

The water was very deep here, and even her topmasts did not show above the water. With her dead crew she had vanished from the sight of man forever.

At home she would be looked for in vain. Her name must henceforth appear upon the shipping lists as "missing." Many a sad heart would wait in vain for the return of husband, brother or lover from that fateful cruise.

Caleb Squeers, sick at heart, turned away.

"By the great hornspoon!" he muttered, "I hope Frank Reade, Jr., will light upon these miserable wretches with the Eclipse and blow them all to perdition! If I ever live to escape from their clutches I'll never cease to make warfare against them. And only to think that a countryman of mine is their leader! It's a pity that he wasn't hung before he was ever sent to Sing Sing!"

Having thus expressed his mind, Caleb sat down moodily to await the course of events.

The pirate junk now stood on her way once more up the coast.

It was some hours later when Squeers knew from the motion of the vessel that they were working into a harbor.

He arose and gazed out of his window. He saw that they were passing through a narrow strait between high cliffs.

Just then the boom of guns were heard. It was a salute, as he presently discovered, fired from the guns of six other vessels which were anchored in a singular basin, protected from the winds and the observation of passing ships by these high cliffs.

It was a singular and secure retreat, seemingly designed by nature for just such a purpose as the present. At the lower end of the basin Squeers saw with surprise that it extended really into a mighty high arched cavern in the face of the cliff.

Into this any of the ships could sail, so high was the roof and so capacious its extent. The waters of the place were alive with small boats or sampans, and upon the shore were throngs of the piratical crew, many hundreds in number.

Squeers realized at once that he was in the

stronghold of the pirates. He experienced a thrill when, as the junk came to anchor, several of the pirates came into his cabin and he was led forth.

In a boat he was taken into the high arched cavern. He found that water did not occupy the whole of the cavern, and upon being set ashore his bonds were cut, and to his amazement Wing Ho said in English:

"We give you liberty here because it is impossible for you to escape. You will be held as a hostage and as protection should we be attacked by the air-ship of which you were a passenger. If the captain of the air-ship refuses to ransom you or attacks us, you will be put to death."

Scores of the pirates were in groups about. Squeers saw a number of bamboo huts near the shore of the basin, but the greatest surprise of all was in store for him when he saw several of his own countrymen approaching him. Three were men and one was a young girl. But what amazed him the most was that one of the men looked decidedly like Frank Reade, Jr.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CAPTURED BY FOES.

It was a dismaying statement that Barney had made that the water was all out of the storage jars, having been spilled during the storm.

Night was at hand, they were three hundred miles from the point where Frank Reade, Jr., had left them, and one thousand feet above the Sea of Waddu.

But there was no time to lose in idle speculation. The mischief done by the typhoon it was necessary to repair at once.

A consultation was instantly held. There seemed only one course, and that was to go to the shore of the inland sea, descend and camp for the night, and fill up the jars the next morning.

It would hardly be safe to go to the village as Prince Kong declared. The Crystal Mountain was infested with highwaymen. The safest and only plan seemed to be to camp for the night upon the shores of the lake.

There was no time to lose, for the electric current which operated the dynamos was already waning. Accordingly, Pomp hastened to start the propeller, and the air-ship went sailing over the inland sea toward the Crystal Mountain.

On the way Prince Kong stood by the rail and entertained Will Deane and Dr. Vaneyke with an account of the famous crystal mines owned by the emperor.

In China and Japan, more particularly the latter country, this crystal is regarded as a sacred emblem, and is much sought after, as well as held at a high price.

In the rough it resembles a bit of quartz rock, but in the hand of the skilled lapidary it soon becomes a beautiful flawless sphere as clear as glass and quite beautiful.

Prince Kong's hearers listened with interest to the account of this valuable gem. When he had finished, Dr. Vaneyke asked:

"Is it possible for foreigners to visit these mines or carry away one of the gems?"

"It is a crime punishable by death to sell a foreigner a sacred crystal," replied Prince Kong. "You see, gentlemen, educating me in your schools has led me to depart somewhat from the traditions and superstitions of my people. As for myself, there is nothing more sacred in the rock crystal than in any other gem. If I were heard to say this by one of our priests,

however, it would cost me my head, even though I am a prince."

"Your people are one of the most ingenious nations on earth," said Dr. Vaneyke; "but you will admit that they are under the cloud of idolatry and superstition?"

"You are right," replied Prince Kong, soberly. "I have never become a Christian and still worship the gods of my people. But I am an atheist in that respect. Some day perhaps the common people of China may become enlightened in things which to them now are dark. There is hope for China."

"Indeed, I believe that," declared Dr. Vaneyke, "the more your people commingle with ours the quicker that end will be reached. The Chinese would rapidly become the foremost people of the earth."

"Let us pray for that time," said Prince Kong, fervently.

By this time the air-ship had settled down in a favorable spot on the shores of the Sea of Addu.

"Begorra, I don't see phwy we couldn't be a fatter pumpin' some wather this very night," said Barney, with sudden inspiration. "I'll fetch enuff in a pail to kape the search-light going, bejabbers!"

Strange to say, this idea had not occurred to any one else. It was instantly decided to act upon it.

"Queer that we didn't think of that in the first place!" cried Dr. Vaneyke. "By day-break we can have all the jars filled and save much time."

The plan was at once acted upon. They were hardly fifty yards from the water and the search-light made a pathway as plain as day.

Barney and Pomp ran a line of hose from the deck to the water and the electric pump in the engine-room was started. In a few moments a good stream of water was flowing.

The jars were being filled rapidly, when suddenly the water ceased to flow. The pump was shut off and Barney started down to the water's edge to locate the trouble.

Prince Kong, who was on the deck, accompanied him. Pomp was at the rail. Dr. Van-

eyke was below, and Will Deane was in the engine-room.

Barney had reached the water's edge and found that the obstruction was a mass of sand and refuse, when Prince Kong who was at his elbow gave a startled cry:

"Phwat's the matter wid yez?" cried Barney, springing up.

The prince had not time to answer.

A chorus of savage yells arose upon the air and the next moment a score of dark forms were swarming about them.

In a twinkling Barney was knocked from his feet and bound, and Prince Kong the same. Then between their powerful captors they were carried swiftly away like bags of merchandise.

Pomp, who was at the air-ship's rail, witnessed the astounding incident. The darky was unarmed and knew that it would be folly to rush down into that crowd and attempt to combat them single handed.

But he gave the alarm quickly enough.

"Golly, fo' goodness! Murder! Jes' come as quick as eber yo' can, Marse Vaneyke. Dey done carry de 'fishman an' de prince away! Fo' de Lor's sake jes' yo' come!"

It is needless to say that Dr. Vaneyke and Will Deane reached the deck quickly. Sam Hop came after them.

"What's the matter?" demanded Dr. Vaneyke, confronting Pomp.

"Dey's jes' carried off Barney an' de prince," cried Pomp, wildly.

"They? Who?" demanded the doctor.

"Sakes alibe! I don' no' no more nor yo', Marse Vaneyke. Some rapscllions, I done fink dem pirates, dey jes' jump out an' tip de two ob dem ober an' carry dem off jes' as yo' would a 'possum. I done fink it am dem pirates what do dat fink."

The doctor remembered what Prince Kong had said of the gang of robbers that infested the Crystal Mountain. That this was their work he felt certain.

There was no time to lose. The abductors must be overtaken.

To leave the air-ship was out of the question. But the jars were already well-filled and the re-

plenishing of the others could be completed at another time.

So the doctor turned to Pomp and said authoritatively:

"Start the rotascopes at once. Do not rise higher than fifty feet. With the search-light we may overtake the scoundrels."

Then the doctor and Will Deane drew in the hose and the gang ladder. Pomp repaired to the pilot-house and the air-ship began to rise.

Dr. Vaneyke now sprang to the search-light. He sent its penetrating rays everywhere and the air-ship went swiftly along changing its course frequently.

In this way unremitting search of the mountain side was made. But not a trace of the abductors or of the abducted ones could be found.

Daylight came and it was only when convinced of its futility that Dr. Vaneyke abandoned the search. The fate of Barney and Prince Kong remained a deep mystery.

Near the spot where they had been seized by the foe, the jacket of Prince Kong was found saturated with blood. This seemed to support a theory which all were much averse to accepting, and this was, that the two luckless voyagers had been murdered.

In the meantime, the presence of the air-ship had been discovered by the people in the town and a great commotion was created there, which was heard even at this distance.

"There is only one decision to accept," declared Dr. Vaneyke, finally, in sad tones; "both Barney and the prince have been murdered. I do not see how we can accept any other explanation."

However, nearly the whole day was spent in the quest. Then it was abandoned by common consent as futile, and the Eclipse, mounting one thousand feet into the air, took her flight from the Crystal Mountain.

All night she kept on her way and with the break of day, a cry from Pomp, who was in the pilot-house, announced that they had reached Fort Kiang Chu, near the underground river. It was decided to descend and hold communications with the garrison of the fort.

[END OF PART FIRST.]

The continuation and conclusion of this story can be found in the FRANK READE LIBRARY No. 86 entitled, "FRANK READE, JR.'S NEW ELECTRIC AIR SHIP THE "ECLIPSE;" or, FIGHTING THE CHINESE PIRATES," by "Noname," Part II.

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